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MARY MARSTON BY GEORGE MAC DONALD, LL.D.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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# MARY MARSTON

BY

GEORGE MAC DONALD, LL.D.

AUTHOR OF "DAVID ELGINBROD," "MALCOLM," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1881.

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TO

# WILLIAM J. MATHESON.

Silver nor gold I have; an empty niche
Is all I offer thee, tried friend and sure;
But with thy name I make my nothing rich,
And largely give, although the gift be poor.

G. M. D.

*Casa Coraggio, Bordighera.*

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# MARY MARSTON.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE SHOP.

It was an evening early in May. The sun was low, and the street was mottled with the shadows of its paving-stones—smooth enough, but far from evenly set. The sky was clear, except for a few clouds in the west, hardly visible in the dazzle of the huge light, which lay amongst them like a liquid that had broken its vessel, and was pouring over the fragments. The street was almost empty, and the air was chill. The spring was busy, and the summer was at hand; but the wind was blowing from the north.

The street was not a common one; there was interest, that is feature, in the shadowy front of almost each of its old houses. Not a few of them wore indeed something like a human expression, the look of having both known and suffered. From many a porch, and many a latticed oriel, a long shadow stretched eastward, like a death-flag streaming in a wind unfelt of the body—or a fluttering leaf, ready to yield, and flit away, and add one more to the mound of blackness gathering on the horizon's edge. It was the main street of an old country town,

dwindled by the rise of larger and more prosperous places, but holding and exercising a charm none of them would ever gain.

Some of the oldest of its houses, most of them with more than one projecting story, stood about the middle of the street. The central and oldest of these was a draper's shop. The windows of the ground-floor encroached a little on the pavement, to which they descended very close, for the floor of the shop was lower than the street. But although they had glass on three oriel sides, they were little used for the advertising of the stores within. A few ribbons and gay handkerchiefs, mostly of cotton, for the eyes of the country people on market-days, formed the chief part of their humble show. The door was wide and very low, the upper half of it of glass—old, and bottle-coloured; and its threshold was a deep step down into the shop. As a place for purchases it might not to some eyes *look* promising, but both the ladies and the housekeepers of Testbridge knew that rarely could they do better in London itself than at the shop of Turnbull and Marston, whether variety, quality, or price, was the point in consideration. And, whatever the first impression concerning it, the moment the eyes of a stranger began to grow accustomed to its gloom, the evident size and plenitude of the shop might well suggest a large hope. It was low, indeed, and the walls could therefore accommodate few shelves; but the ceiling was therefore so near as to be itself available for stowage by means of well-contrived slides and shelves attached to the great beams crossing it in several directions. During the shop-day, many an article, light as lace, and heavy as broadcloth, was taken from overhead to lay upon the counter. The shop had a special reputation for all kinds of linen goods, from cambric handkerchiefs to towels, and

from table napkins to sheets; but almost everything was to be found in it, from Manchester moleskins for the navy's trousers, to Genoa velvet for the dowager's gown, and from Horrocks's prints to Lyons silks. It had been enlarged at the back, by building beyond the original plan, and that part of it was a little higher, and a little better lighted than the front; but the whole place was still dark enough to have awaked the envy of any swindling London shopkeeper. Its owners, however, had so long enjoyed the confidence of the neighbourhood, that faith readily took the place of sight with their customers—so far at least as quality was concerned; and seldom, except in a question of colour or shade, was an article carried to the door to be confronted with the day. It had been just such a shop, untouched of even legendary change, as far back as the memory of the sexton reached; and he, because of his age and his occupation, was the chief authority in the local history of the place.

As, on this evening, there were few people in the street, so were there few in the shop, and it was on the point of being closed: they were not particular there to a good many minutes either way. Behind the counter, on the left hand, stood a youth of about twenty, young George Turnbull, the son of the principal partner, occupied in leisurely folding and putting aside a number of things he had been showing to a farmer's wife, who was just gone. He was an ordinary-looking lad, with little more than business in his high forehead, fresh-coloured, good-humoured, self-satisfied cheeks, and keen hazel eyes. These last kept wandering from his not very pressing occupation to the other side of the shop, where stood, behind the opposing counter, a young woman, in attendance upon the wants of a well-dressed youth in front of it, who had just made choice of a pair of driving-

gloves. His air and carriage were conventionally those of a gentleman—a gentleman, however, more than ordinarily desirous of pleasing a young woman behind a counter. She answered him with politeness, and even friendliness, nor seemed aware of anything unusual in his attentions.

"They're splendid gloves," he said, making talk; "but don't you think it a great price for a pair of gloves, Miss Marston?"

"It *is* a good deal of money," she answered in a sweet quiet voice, whose very tone suggested simplicity and straightforwardness; "but they will last you a long time. Just look at the work, Mr. Helmer. You see how they are made? It is much more difficult to stitch them like that, one edge over the other, than to sew the two edges together, as they do with ladies' gloves. But I'll just ask my father whether he marked them himself."

"He did mark those, I know," said young Turnbull, who had been listening to all that went on, "for I heard my father say they ought to be sixpence more."

"Ah, then!" she returned assentingly, and laid the gloves on the box before her, the question settled.

Helmer took them, and began to put them on.

"They certainly are the only glove, where there is much handling of reins," he said.

"That is what Mr. Wardour says of them," rejoined Miss Marston.

"By the bye," said Helmer, lowering his voice, "when did you see anybody from Thornwick?"

"Their old man was in the town yesterday with the dog-cart."

"Nobody with him?"

"Miss Letty. She came in for just two minutes or so."

"How was she looking?"

"Very well, answered Miss Marston, with what to Helmer seemed indifference.

"Ah!" he said, with a look of knowingness, "you girls don't see each other with the same eyes as we. I grant Letty is not very tall, and I grant she has not much of a complexion; but where did you ever see such eyes?"

"You must excuse me, Mr. Helmer," returned Mary, with a smile, "if I don't choose to discuss Letty's merits with you: she is my friend."

"Where would be the harm?" rejoined Helmer, looking puzzled. "I am not likely to say anything against her. You know perfectly well I admire her beyond any woman in the world. I don't care who knows it."

"Your mother?" suggested Mary, in the tone of one who makes a venture.

"Ah, come now, Miss Marston! Don't you turn my mother loose upon me. I shall be of age in a few months, and then my mother may—think as she pleases. I know of course, with her notions, she would never consent to my making love to Letty—"

"I should think not!" exclaimed Mary. "Who ever thought of such an absurdity? Not you, surely, Mr. Helmer? What would your mother say to hear you? I mention her in earnest now."

"Let mothers mind their own business!" retorted the youth angrily. "I shall mind mine. My mother ought to know that by this time."

Mary said no more. She knew Mrs. Helmer was not a mother to deserve her boy's confidence, any more than to gain it; for she treated him as if she had made him, and was not satisfied with her work.

"When are you going to see Letty, Miss Marston?" resumed Helmer, after a brief pause of angry feeling.

"Next Sunday evening probably."

"Take me with you."

"Take you with me! What are you dreaming of, Mr. Helmer?"

"I would give my bay mare for a good talk with Letty Lovel," he returned.

Mary made no reply.

"You won't?" he said petulantly, after a vain pause of expectation.

"Won't what?" rejoined Miss Marston, as if she could not believe him in earnest.

"Take me with you on Sunday?"

"No," she answered quietly, but with sober decision.

"Where would be the harm?" pleaded the youth, in a tone mingled of expostulation, entreaty, and mortification.

"One is not bound to do everything there would be no harm in doing," answered Miss Marston. "Besides, Mr. Helmer, I don't choose to go out walking with you of a Sunday evening."

"Why not?"

"For one thing, your mother would not like it. You know she would not."

"Never mind my mother. She's nothing to you. She can't bite you.—Ask the dentist. Come, come! that's all nonsense. I shall be at the stile beyond the turnpike gate all the afternoon—waiting till you come."

"The moment I see you—anywhere upon the road—that moment I shall turn back.—Do you think," she added with half-amused indignation, "I would put up with having all the gossips of Testbridge talk of my going out on a Sunday evening with a boy like you?"

Tom Helmer's face flushed. He caught up the gloves, threw the price of them on the counter, and walked from the shop, without even a good-night.

"Hullo!" cried George Turnbull, vaulting over the counter, and taking the place Helmer had just left opposite Mary; "what did you say to the fellow to send him off like that? If you do hate the business, you needn't scare the customers, Mary."

"I don't hate the business, you know quite well, George. And if I did scare a customer," she added, laughing, as she dropped the money in the till, "it was not before he had done buying."

"That may be; but we must look to to-morrow as well as to-day. When is Mr. Helmer likely to come near us again, after such a wipe as you must have given him to make him go off like that?"

"Just to-morrow, George, I fancy," answered Mary. "He won't be able to bear the thought of having left a bad impression on me, and so he'll come again to remove it. After all, there's something about him I can't help liking. I said nothing that ought to have put him out of temper like that, though; I only called him a boy."

"Let me tell you, Mary, you could not have called him a worse name."

"Why, what else is he?"

"A more offensive word a man could not hear from the lips of a woman," said George loftily.

"A man, I daresay! But Mr. Helmer can't be nineteen yet."

"How can you say so, when he told you himself he would be of age in a few months? The fellow is older than I am. You'll be calling me a boy next."

"What else are you? You at least are not one-and-twenty."

"And how old do you call yourself, pray, miss?"

"Three-and-twenty last birthday."

"A mighty difference indeed!"

"Not much—only all the difference, it seems, between sense and absurdity, George."

"That may be all very true of a fine gentleman, like Helmer, that does nothing from morning to night but run away from his mother; but you don't think it applies to me, Mary, I hope!"

"That's as you behave yourself, George. If you do not make it apply, it won't apply of itself. But if young women had not more sense than most of the young men I see in the shop—on both sides of the counter, George—things would soon be at a fine pass. Nothing better in your head than in a peacock's! only that a peacock *has* the fine feathers he's so proud of."

"If it were Mr. Wardour now, Mary, that was spreading his tail for you to see, you would not complain of that peacock!"

A vivid rose blossomed instantly in Mary's cheek. Mr. Wardour was not even an acquaintance of hers. He was cousin and friend to Letty Lovel, indeed, but she had never spoken to him, except in the shop.

"It would not be quite out of place if you were to learn a little respect for your superiors, George," she returned. "Mr. Wardour is not to be thought of in the same moment with the young men that were in my mind. Mr. Wardour is not a young man; and he is a gentleman."

She took the glove-box, and turning placed it on a shelf behind her.

"Just so!" remarked George bitterly. "Any man you don't choose to count a gentleman, you look down upon! What have you got to do with gentlemen, I should like to know?"

"To admire one when I see him," answered Mary. "Why shouldn't I? It is very seldom, and it does me good."

"Oh, yes!" rejoined George, contemptuously. "You *call* yourself a lady, but—"

"I do nothing of the kind," interrupted Mary sharply. "I should *like* to be a lady; and inside of me, please God, I *will* be a lady; but I leave it to other people to call me this or that. It matters little what any one is *called*."

"All right," returned George, a little cowed; "I don't mean to contradict you. Only just tell me why a well-to-do tradesman shouldn't be a gentleman as well as a small yeoman like Wardour."

"Why don't you say—as well as a squire, or an earl, or a duke?" said Mary.

"There you are, chaffing me again! It's hard enough to have every fool of a lawyer's clerk, or a doctor's boy, looking down upon a fellow, and calling him a counter-jumper; but, upon my soul, it's too bad when a girl in the same shop hasn't a civil word for him, because he isn't what she counts a gentleman! Isn't my father a gentleman? Answer me that, Mary."

It was one of George's few good things that he had a great opinion of his father, though the grounds of it were hardly such as to enable Mary to answer his appeal in a way he would have counted satisfactory. She thought of her own father, and was silent.

"Everything depends on what a man is in himself, George," she answered. "Mr. Wardour would be a gentleman all the same if he were a shopkeeper or a blacksmith."

"And shouldn't I be as good a gentleman as Mr. Wardour, if I had been born with an old tumble-down house on my back, and a few acres of land I could do with as I liked? Come, answer me that."

"If it be the house and the land that makes the difference, you would, of course," answered Mary.

Her tone implied, even to George's rough perceptions, that there was a good deal more of a difference between them than therein lay. But common people, whether lords or shopkeepers, are slow to understand that possession, whether in the shape of birth, or lands, or money, or intellect, is a small affair in the difference between men.

"I know you don't think me fit to hold a candle to him," he said. "But I happen to know, for all he rides such a good horse, he's not above doing the work of a wretched menial, for he polishes his own stirrup-irons."

"I'm very glad to hear it," rejoined Mary. "He must be more of a gentleman yet than I thought him."

"Then why should you count him a better gentleman than me?"

"I'm afraid, for one thing, you would go with your stirrup-irons rusty, rather than clean them yourself, George. But I will tell you one thing Mr. Wardour would not do if he were a shopkeeper: he would not, like you, talk one way to the rich, and another way to the poor—all submission and politeness to the one, and familiarity, even to rudeness, with the other! If you go on like that, you'll never come within sight of being a gentleman, George—not if you live to the age of Methuselah."

"Thank you, Miss Mary! It's a fine thing to have a lady in the shop! Shouldn't I just like my father to hear you! I'm blowed if I know how a fellow is to get on with you! Certain sure I am that it ain't *my* fault if we're not friends."

Mary made no reply. She could not help understanding what George meant, and she flushed, with honest anger, from brow to chin. But, while her dark-blue eyes flamed with indignation, her anger was not such as to render her face less pleasant to look upon.

There are as many kinds of anger as there are of the sunsets with which they ought to end: Mary's anger had no hate in it.

I must now hope my readers sufficiently interested in my narrative to care that I should tell them something of what she was like. Plainly as I see her, I cannot do more for them than that. I cannot give a portrait of her; I can but cast her shadow on my page. It was a dainty half-length, neither tall nor short, in a plain, well-fitting dress of black silk, with linen collar and cuffs, that rose above the counter, standing, in spite of displeasure, calm and motionless. Her hair was dark, and dressed in the simplest manner, without even a reminder of the hideous occipital structure then in favour—especially with shopwomen, who in general choose for imitation and exorbitant development whatever is ugliest and least ladylike in the fashion of the hour. It had a natural wave in it, which broke the too straight lines it would otherwise have made across a forehead of sweet and composing proportions. Her features were regular —her nose straight—perhaps a little thin; the curve of her upper lip carefully drawn, as if with design to express a certain firmness of modesty; and her chin well shaped, perhaps a little too sharply defined for her years, and rather large. Everything about her suggested the repose of order satisfied, of unconstrained obedience to the laws of harmonious relation. The only fault honest criticism could have suggested, merely suggested, was the presence of just a possible *nuance* of primness. Her boots, at this moment unseen of any, fitted her feet, as her feet fitted her body. Her hands were especially good. There are not many ladies interested in their own graces, who would not have envied her such seals to her natural patent of ladyhood. Her speech and manners

corresponded with her person and dress; they were direct and simple, in tone and inflection, those of one at peace with herself. Neatness was more notable in her than grace, but grace was not absent; good breeding was more evident than delicacy, yet delicacy was there; and unity was plain throughout.

George went back to his own side of the shop, jumped the counter, put the cover on the box he had left open with a bang, and shoved it into its place as if it had been the backboard of a cart, shouting as he did so to a boy invisible, to make haste and put up the shutters. Mary left the shop by a door on the inside of the counter, for she and her father lived in the house; and, as soon as the shop was closed, George went home to the villa his father had built in the suburbs.

## CHAPTER II.

### CUSTOMERS.

THE next day was Saturday, a busy one at the shop. From the neighbouring villages and farms came customers not a few; and ladies, from the country seats around, began to arrive as the hours went on. The whole strength of the establishment was early called out.

Busiest in serving was the senior partner, Mr. Turnbull. He was a stout, florid man, with a bald crown, a heavy watch-chain of the best gold festooned across the wide space between waistcoat-button-hole and pocket, and a large hemispheroidal carbuncle on a huge fat finger, which yet was his little one. He was close-shaved, double-chinned, and had cultivated an ordinary smile to such an extraordinary degree, that, to use the common hyperbole, it reached from ear to ear. By

nature he was good-tempered and genial; but, having devoted every mental as well as physical endowment to the making of money, what few drops of spiritual water were in him had to go with the rest to the turning of the mill-wheel that ground the universe into coin. In his own eyes he was a strong churchman, but the only sign of it visible to others was the strength of his contempt for dissenters—which, however, excepting his partner and Mary, he showed only to church-people; a dissenter's money being, as he often remarked, when once in his till, as good as the best churchman's.

To the receptive eye he was a sight not soon to be forgotten, as he bent over a piece of goods outspread before a customer, one hand resting on the stuff, the other on the yard-measure, his chest as nearly touching the counter as the protesting adjacent parts would permit, his broad smooth face turned up at right angles, and his mouth, eloquent even to solemnity on the merits of the article, now hiding now disclosing a gulf of white teeth. No sooner was anything admitted into stock, than he bent his soul to the selling of it, doing everything that could be done, saying everything he could think of saying, short of plain lying as to its quality: that he was not guilty of. To buy well was a care to him, to sell well was a greater, but to make money, and that as speedily as possible, was his greatest care, and his whole ambition.

John Turnbull in his gig, as he drove along the road to the town, and through the street approached his shop-door, showed to the chance observer a man who knew himself of importance, a man who might have a soul somewhere inside that broad waistcoat; as he drew up, threw the reins to his stable-boy, and descended upon the pavement—as he stepped down into the shop even, he looked a being in whom son or daughter or friend

might feel some honest pride; but the moment he was behind the counter and in front of a customer, he changed to a creature whose appearance and carriage were painfully contemptible to any beholder who loved his kind; he had lost the upright bearing of a man, and cringed like an ape. But I fear it was thus he had gained a portion at least of his favour with the country folk, many of whom much preferred his ministrations to those of his partner. A glance, indeed, from the one to the other was enough to reveal which must be the better salesman—and to some eyes which the better man.

In the narrow walk of his commerce—behind the counter, I mean—Mr. Marston stood up tall and straight, lank and lean, seldom bending more than his long neck in the direction of the counter, but doing everything needful upon it notwithstanding, from the unusual length of his arms and his bony hands. His forehead was high and narrow, his face pale and thin, his hair long and thin, his nose aquiline and thin, his eyes large, his mouth and chin small. He seldom spoke a syllable more than was needful, but his words breathed calm respect to every customer. His conversation with one was commonly all but over as he laid something for approval or rejection on the counter: he had already taken every pains to learn the precise nature of the necessity or desire; and what he then offered he submitted without comment; if the thing was not judged satisfactory, he removed it and brought another. Many did not like this mode of service; they would be helped to buy; unequal to the task of making up their minds, they welcomed any aid towards it; and therefore preferred Mr. Turnbull, who gave them every imaginable and unimaginable assistance, grovelling before them like a man whose many gods came to him one after the other to be worshipped;

while Mr. Marston, the moment the thing he presented was on the counter, shot straight up like a poplar in a sudden calm, his visage bearing witness that his thought was already far away—in heavenly places with his wife, or hovering like a perplexed bee over some difficult passage in the New Testament: Mary could have told which, for she knew the meaning of every shadow that passed or lingered on his countenance.

His partner and his like-minded son despised him, as a matter of course; his unbusiness-like habits, as they counted them, were the constantly recurring theme of their scorn; and some of these would doubtless have brought him the disapprobation of many a business man of a moral development beyond that of Turnbull; but Mary saw nothing in them which did not stamp her father the superior of all other men she knew.

To mention one thing, which may serve as typical of the man: he not unfrequently sold things under the price marked by his partner. Against this breach of fealty to the firm, Turnbull never ceased to level his biggest guns of indignation and remonstrance, though always without effect. He even lowered himself in his own eyes so far as to quote Scripture like a canting dissenter, and remind his partner of what came to a house divided against itself. He did not see that the best thing for some houses must be to come to pieces. "Well, but, Mr. Turnbull, I thought it was marked too high," was the other's invariable answer. "William, you are a fool," his partner would rejoin for the hundredth time. "Will you never understand that, if we get a little more than the customary profit upon one thing, we get less upon another? You must make the thing even, or come to the workhouse." Thereto, for the hundredth time also, William Marston would reply, "That *might* hold, I daresay, Mr. Turnbull—

I am not sure—if every customer always bought an article of each of the two sorts together; but I can't make it straight with my conscience that one customer should pay too much because I let another pay too little. Besides, I am not at all sure that the general scale of profit is not set too high. I fear you and I will have to part, Mr. Turnbull." But nothing was farther from Turnbull's desire than that he and Marston should part: he could not keep the business going without his money, not to mention that he never doubted Marston would straightway open another shop, and, even if he did not undersell him, take from him all his dissenting customers; for the junior partner was deacon of a small Baptist church in the town—a fact which, although like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes of John Turnbull in his villa, was invaluable in the eyes of John Turnbull behind his counter.

Whether William Marston was right or wrong in his ideas about the rite of baptism—probably he was both—he was certainly right in his relation to that which alone makes it of any value—that, namely, which it signifies: buried with his Master, he had died to selfishness, greed, and trust in the secondary; died to evil, and risen to good—a new creature. He was just as much a Christian in his shop as in the chapel, in his bed-room as at the prayer-meeting.

But the world was not now much temptation to him, and to tell the truth, he was getting a good deal tired of the shop. He had to remind himself, oftener and oftener, that in the meantime it was the work given him to do, and to take more and more frequently the strengthening cordial of a glance across the shop at his daughter. Such a glance passed through the dusky place like summer lightning through a heavy atmosphere, and came to Mary

like a glad prophecy; for it told of a world within and beyond the world, a region of love and faith, where struggled no antagonistic desires, no counteracting aims, but unity was the visible garment of truth.

The question may well suggest itself to my reader—How could such a man be so unequally yoked with such another as Turnbull?—To this I reply that Marston's greatness had yet a certain repressive power upon the man who despised him, so that he never uttered his worst thoughts or revealed his worst basenesses in his presence. Marston never thought of him as my reader must soon think—flattered himself, indeed, that poor John was gradually improving, coming to see things more and more as he would have him look on them. Add to this, that they had been in the business together almost from boyhood, and much will be explained.

An open carriage, with a pair of showy but ill-matched horses, looking unfit for country work on the one hand, as for Hyde Park on the other, drew up at the door; and a visible wave of interest ran from end to end of the shop, swaying as well those outside as those inside the counter, for the carriage was well known in Testbridge. It was that of Lady Margaret Mortimer: she did not herself like the *Margaret*, and signed only her second name *Alice* at full length, whence her *friends* generally called her to each other Lady Malice. She did not leave the carriage, but continued to recline motionless in it, at an angle of forty-five degrees, wrapped in furs, for the day was cloudy and cold, her pale handsome face looking inexpressibly more indifferent in its regard of earth and sky and the goings of men, than that of a corpse whose gaze is only on the inside of the coffin-lid. But the two ladies who were with her got down. One of them was her daughter, Hesper by name, who, from the dull cloudy

atmosphere that filled the doorway, entered the shop like a gleam of sunshine, dusky-golden, followed by a glowing shadow, in the person of her cousin, Miss Yolland.

Turnbull hurried to meet them, bowing profoundly, and looking very much like Issachar between the chairs he carried. But they turned aside to where Mary stood, and in a few minutes the counter was covered with various stuffs for some of the smaller articles of ladies' attire.

The customers were hard to please, for they wanted the best things at the price of inferior ones, and Mary noted that the desires of the cousin were farther reaching and more expensive than those of Miss Mortimer. But though in this way hard to please, they were not therefore unpleasant to deal with; and from the moment she looked the latter in the face, whom she had not seen since she was a girl, Mary could hardly take her eyes off her. All at once it struck her how well the unusual, fantastic name her mother had given her, suited her; and as she gazed, the feeling grew.

Large, and grandly made, Hesper stood "straight, and steady, and tall," dusky-fair and colourless, with the carriage of a young matron. Her brown hair seemed ever scathed and crinkled afresh by the ethereal flame that here and there peeped from amidst the unwilling volute rolled back from her creamy forehead in a rebellious coronet. Her eyes were large and hazel; her nose cast gently upward, answering the carriage of her head; her mouth decidedly large, but so exquisite in drawing and finish, that the loss of a centimetre of its length would to a lover have been as the loss of a kingdom; her chin a trifle large, and grandly lined; for a woman's, her throat was massive, and her arms and hands were powerful. Her expression was frank, almost brave, her eyes looking

full at the person she addressed. As she gazed, a kind of love she had never felt before kept swelling in Mary's heart.

Her companion impressed her very differently.

Some men, and most women, counted Miss Yolland *strangely* ugly. But there were men who exceedingly admired her. Not very slight for her stature, and above the middle height, she looked small beside Hesper. Her skin was very dark, with a considerable touch of sallowness; her eyes, which were large and beautifully shaped, were as black as eyes could be, with light in the midst of their blackness, and more than a touch of hardness in the midst of their liquidity; her eyelashes were singularly long and black, and she seemed conscious of them every time they rose. She did not *use* her eyes habitually, but when she did, the thrust was sudden and straight. I heard a man once say that a look from her was like a volley of small arms. Like Hesper's, her mouth was large and good, with fine teeth; her chin projected a little too much; her hands were finer than Hesper's, but bony. Her name was Septimia; Lady Margaret called her Sepia, and the contraction seemed to so many suitable, that it was ere long generally adopted. She was in mourning, with a little crape. To the first glance she seemed as unlike Hesper as she could well be; but, as she stood gently regarding the two, Mary, gradually, and to her astonishment, became indubitably aware of a singular likeness between them. Sepia, being a few years older, and in less flourishing condition, had her features sharper and finer, and by nature her complexion was darker by shades innumerable; but, if the one was the evening, the other was the night: Sepia was a diminished and overshadowed Hesper. Their manner too was similar, but Sepia's was the haughtier, and she had an occasional

look of defiance, of which there appeared nothing in Hesper. When first she came to Durnmelling, Lady Malice had once alluded to the dependence of her position —but only once: there came a flash into rather than out of Sepia's eyes, that made any repetition of the insult impossible, and Lady Malice wish that she had left her a wanderer on the face of Europe.

Sepia was the daughter of a clergyman, an uncle of Lady Malice, whose sons had all gone to the bad, and whose daughters had all vanished from society. Shortly before the time at which my narrative begins, one of the latter, however, namely Sepia, the youngest, had reappeared, a fragment of the family wreck, floating over the gulf of its destruction. Nobody knew with any certainty where she had been in the interim; nobody at Durnmelling knew anything but what she chose to tell, and that was not much. She said she had been a governess in Austrian Poland and Russia. Lady Margaret had become reconciled to her presence, and Hesper attached to her.

Of the men who, as I have said, admired her, some felt a peculiar enchantment in what they called her ugliness; others declared her devilish handsome; and some shrank from her as if with an undefined dread of perilous entanglement, if she should but catch them looking her in the face. Amongst some of them she was known as Lucifer, in antithesis to Hesper: they meant the Lucifer of darkness, not the light-bringer of the morning.

The ladies, on their part, especially Hesper, were much pleased with Mary. The simplicity of her address and manner, the pains she took to find the exact thing she wanted, and the modest decision with which she answered any reference to her, made Hesper even like her. The most artificially educated of women is yet human, and capable of even more than liking a fellow-creature as such.

When their purchases were ended, she took her leave with a kind smile, which went on glowing in Mary's heart long after she had vanished.

"Home, John," said Lady Margaret the moment the two ladies were seated. "—I hope you have got *all* you wanted. We shall be late for luncheon, I fear. I would not for worlds keep Mr. Redmain waiting.—A little faster, John, please."

Hesper's face darkened. Sepia eyed her fixedly, from under the mingling of ascended lashes and descended brows. The coachman pretended to obey, but the horses knew very well when he did and when he did not mean them to go, and took not a step to the minute more: John had regard to the splendid-looking black horse on the near side, which was weak in the wind, as well as on one fired pastern, and cared little for the anxiety of his mistress. To him, horses were the final peak of creation—or if not the horses, the coachman, whose they are—masters and mistresses the merest parasitical adjuncts. He got them home in good time for luncheon, notwithstanding—more to Lady Margaret's than Hesper's satisfaction.

Mr. Redmain was a bachelor of fifty, to whom Lady Margaret was endeavouring to make the family agreeable, in the hope he might take Hesper off their hands. I need not say he was rich. He was a comman man, with good cold manners, which he offered you like a handle. He was selfish, capable of picking up a lady's handkerchief, but hardly a wife's. He was attentive to Hesper; but she scarcely concealed such a repugnance to him as some feel at sight of strange fishes—being at the same time afraid of him, which was not surprising, as she could hardly fail to perceive the fate intended for her.

"Ain't Miss Mortimer a stunner?" said George Turn-

bull to Mary, when the tide of customers had finally ebbed from the shop.

"I don't exactly know what you mean, George," answered Mary.

"Oh, of course, I know it ain't fair to ask any girl to admire another," said George. "But there's no offence to you, Mary. One young lady can't carry *every* merit on her back. She'd be too lovely to live, you know. Miss Mortimer 'ain't got your waist, nor she 'ain't got your 'ands, nor your 'air; and you 'ain't got her size, nor the sort of hair she 'as with her."

He looked up from the piece of leno he was smoothing out, and saw he was alone in the shop.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE ARBOUR AT THORNWICK.

The next day was Sunday at last, a day dear to all who do anything like their duty in the week, whether they go to church or not. For Mary, she went to the Baptist chapel; it was her custom, rendered holy by the companionship of her father. But this day it was with more than ordinary restlessness and lack of interest that she stood, knelt, and sat, through the routine of observance; for old Mr. Duppa was certainly duller than usual: how could it be otherwise, when he had been preparing to spend a mortal hour in descanting on the reasons which necessitated the separation of all true Baptists from all brother-believers? The narrow, high-souled little man—for a soul as well as a forehead can be both high and narrow, was dull that morning because he spoke out of his narrowness, and not out of his height; and Mary was better justified in feeling bored, than even when George

Turnbull plagued her with his vulgar attentions. When she got out at last, sedate as she was, she could hardly help skipping along the street by her father's side. Far better than chapel was their nice little cold dinner together, in their only sitting-room, redolent of the multifarious goods piled around it on all the rest of the floor. Greater yet was the following pleasure—of making her father lie down on the sofa, and reading him to sleep, after which she would doze a little herself, and dream a little, in the great chair that had been her grandmother's. Then they had their tea, and then her father always went to see the minister before chapel in the evening.

When he was gone, Mary would put on her pretty straw bonnet, and set out to visit Letty Lovel at Thornwick. Some of the church-members thought this habit of taking a walk instead of going again to the chapel, very worldly, and did not scruple to let her know their opinion; but so long as her father was satisfied with her, Mary did not care a straw for the world besides. She was too much occupied with obedience to trouble her head about opinion, either her own or other people's. Not until a question comes puzzling and troubling us so as to paralyze the energy of our obedience, is there any necessity for its solution, or any probability of finding a real one. A thousand foolish *doctrines* may lie unquestioned in the mind, and never interfere with the growth or bliss of him who lives in active subordination of his life to the law of life: obedience will in time exorcise them, like many another worse devil.

It had drizzled all the morning from the clouds as well as from the pulpit, but just as Mary stepped out of the kitchen-door, the sun stepped out of the last rain-cloud. She walked quickly from the town, eager for the fields and the trees, but in some dread of finding Tom

Helmer at the stile; for he was such a fool, she said to herself, that there was no knowing what he might do, for all she had said; but he had thought better of it, and she was soon crossing meadows and cornfields in peace, by a path which, with many a winding, and many an up and down, was the nearest way to Thornwick.

The saints of old did well to pray God to lift on them the light of His countenance: has the Christian of the new time learned of his Master that the clouds and the sunshine come and go of themselves? If the sunshine fills the hearts of old men and babes and birds with gladness and praise, and God never meant it, then are they all idolators, and have but a careless Father. Sweet earthy odours rose about Mary from the wet ground; the rain-drops glittered on the grass and corn-blades and hedgerows; a soft damp wind breathed rather than blew about the gaps and gates; with an upward springing, like that of a fountain momently gathering strength, the larks kept shooting aloft, there, like music-rockets to explode in showers of glowing and sparkling song; while all the time and over all, the sun as he went down, kept shining in the might of his peace; and the heart of Mary praised her Father in heaven.

Where the narrow path ran westward for a little way, so that she could see nothing for the sun in her eyes, in the middle of a ploughed field she would have run right against a gentleman had he been as blind as she; but his back being to the sun, he saw her perfectly, and stepped out of her way into the midst of a patch of stiff soil, where the rain was yet lying between the furrows. She saw him then, and as, lifting his hat, he stepped again upon the path, she recognized Mr. Wardour.

"Oh, your nice boots!" she cried, in the childlike distress of a simple soul discovering itself the cause of

catastrophe, for his boots were smeared all over with yellow clay.

"It only serves me right," returned Mr. Wardour, with a laugh of amusement. "I oughtn't to have put on such thin ones at the first smile of summer."

Again he lifted his hat, and walked on.

Mary also pursued her path, genuinely though gently pained that one should have stepped up to the ankles in mud on her account. As I have already said, except in the shop she had never before spoken to Mr. Wardour, and although he had so simply responded to her exclamation, he did not even know who she was.

The friendship which now drew Mary to Thornwick, Godfrey Wardour's place, was not one of long date. She and Letty Lovel had, it is true, known each other for years, but only quite of late had their acquaintance ripened into something better; and it was not without protestation on the part of Mrs. Wardour, Godfrey's mother, that she had seen the growth of an intimacy between the two young women. The society of a shop-woman, she often remarked, was far from suitable for one who, as the daughter of a professional man, might lay claim to the position of a gentlewoman. For Letty was the orphan daughter of a country surgeon, a cousin of Mrs. Wardour, for whom she had had a great liking while yet they were boy and girl together. At the same time, however much she would have her consider herself the superior of Mary Marston, she by no means treated her as her own equal, and Letty could not help being afraid of her aunt, as she called her.

The well-meaning woman was in fact possessed by two devils—the one the stiff-necked devil of pride, the other the condescending devil of benevolence. She was kind, but she must have credit for it; and Letty, although

the child of a loved cousin, must not presume upon that, or forget that the wife and mother of long-descended proprietors of certain acres of land, was greatly the superior of any man who lived by the exercise of the best educated and most helpful profession. She counted herself a devout Christian, but her ideas of rank, at least —therefore certainly not a few others—were absolutely opposed to the Master's teaching: they who did least for others were her aristocracy.

Now Letty was a simple, true-hearted girl, rather slow, who honestly tried to understand her aunt's position with regard to her friend. "Shop-girls," her aunt had said, "are not fitting company for you, Letty."

"I do not know any other shop-girls, aunt," Letty replied with hidden trembling; "but if they are not nice, then they are not like Mary. She's downright good; indeed she is, aunt!—a great deal, ever so much, better than I am."

"That may well be," answered Mrs. Wardour, "but it does not make a lady of her."

"I am sure," returned Letty, bewildered, "on Sundays you could not tell the difference between her and any other young lady."

"Any other well-dressed young woman, my dear, you should say. I believe shop-girls do call their companions young ladies, but that cannot justify the application of the word. I am scarcely bound to speak of my cook as a lady because letters come addressed to her as Miss Tozer. If the word 'lady' should sink at last to common use, as in Italy every woman is Donna, we must find some other word to express what *used* to be meant by it."

"Is Mrs. Cropper a lady, aunt?" asked Letty, after a pause, in which her brains, which were not half so muddled as she thought them, had been busy feeling

after firm ground in the morass of social distinction thus opened under her.

"She is received as such," replied Mrs. Wardour, but with doubled stiffness, through which ran a tone of injury.

"Would you receive her, aunt, if she called upon you?"

"She has horses and servants, and everything a woman of the world can desire; but I should feel I was bowing the knee to Mammon, were I to ask her to my house. Yet such is the respect paid to money in these degenerate days, that many a one will court the society of a person like that, who would think me or your cousin Godfrey unworthy of notice, because we have no longer a tithe of the property the family once possessed."

The lady forgot there is a Rimmon as well as a Mammon.

"God knows," she went on, "how that woman's husband made his money! But that is a small matter now-a-days, except to old-fashioned people like myself. Not *how*, but *how much*, is all the question now," she concluded, flattering herself she had made a good point.

"Don't think me rude, please, aunt: I am really wishing to understand—but if Mrs. Cropper is not a lady, how can Mary Marston not be one? She is as different from Mrs. Cropper as one woman can be from another."

"Because she has not the position in society," replied Mrs. Wardour, enveloping her nothing in flimsy reiteration and self-contradiction.

"And Mrs. Cropper has the position?" ventured Letty, with a little palpitation from fear of offending.

"Apparently so," answered Mrs. Wardour. But her inquiring pupil did not feel much enlightened.

Letty had not the logic necessary to the thinking of the thing out; or to the discovery that, like most social difficulties, hers was merely one of the upper strata of a

question whose foundation lies far too deep for what is called Society to perceive its very existence. And hence it is no wonder that Society, abetted by the Church, should go on from generation to generation, talking murderous platitudes about it.

But although such was her reasoning beforehand, heart had so far overcome habit and prejudice with Mrs. Wardour, that, convinced on the first interview of the high tone and good influence of Mary, she had gradually come to put herself in the way of seeing her as often as she came, ostensibly to herself that she might prevent any deterioration of intercourse; and although she always, on these occasions, played the grand lady, with a stateliness that seemed to say, "Because of your individual worth, I condescend, and make an exception, but you must not imagine I receive your class at Thornwick," she had almost entirely ceased making remarks upon the said class in Letty's hearing.

On her part, Letty had by this time grown so intimate with Mary as to open with her the question upon which her aunt had given her so little satisfaction; and this same Sunday afternoon, as they sat in the arbour at the end of the long yew hedge in the old garden, it had come up again between them; for, set thinking by Letty's bewilderment, Mary had gone on thinking, and had at length laid hold of the matter, at least by the end that belonged to *her*.

"I cannot consent, Letty," she said, "to trouble my mind about it as you do. I cannot afford it. Society is neither my master nor my servant, neither my father nor my sister; and so long as she does not bar my way to the kingdom of heaven, which is the only society worth getting into, I feel no right to complain of how she treats me. I have no claim on her; I do not acknowledge her

laws—hardly her existence, and she has no authority over me. Why should she, how could she, constituted as she is, receive such as me? The moment she did so, she would cease to be what she is; and if all be true that one hears of her, she does me a kindness in excluding me. What can it matter to me, Letty, whether they call me a lady or not, so long as Jesus says *Daughter* to me? It reminds me of what I heard my father say once to Mr. Turnbull, when he had been protesting that none but church-people ought to be buried in the churchyards. 'I don't care a straw about it, Mr. Turnbull,' he said. 'The Master was buried in a garden.'—'Ah, but you see things are different now,' said Mr. Turnbull.—'I don't hang by things, but by my Master. It is enough for the disciple that he should be as his Master,' said my father.—'Besides, you don't think it of any real consequence yourself, or you would never want to keep your brothers and sisters out of such nice quiet places!'—Mr. Turnbull gave his kind of grunt, and said no more."

After passing Mary, Mr. Wardour did not go very far before he began to slacken his pace; a moment or two more and he suddenly wheeled round, and began to walk back towards Thornwick. Two things had combined to produce this change of purpose—the first, the state of his boots, which, beginning to dry in the sun and wind as he walked, grew more and more hideous at the end of his new grey trowsers; the other, the occurring suspicion that the girl must be Letty's new shopkeeping friend, Miss Marston, on her way to visit her. What a sweet, simple young woman she was! he thought; and straightway began to argue with himself that, as his boots were in such evil plight, it would be more pleasant to spend the evening with Letty and her friend, than to hold on his way to his own friend's, and spend the evening smok-

ing and lounging about the stable, or hearing his sister play polkas and mazurkas all the still Sunday twilight.

Mary had, of course, upon her arrival, narrated her small adventure, and the conversation had again turned upon Godfrey just as he was nearing the house.

"How handsome your cousin is!" said Mary, with the simplicity natural to her.

"Do you think so?" returned Letty.

"Don't *you* think so?" rejoined Mary.

"I have never thought about it," answered Letty.

"He looks so manly, and has such a straightforward way with him!" said Mary.

"What one sees every day, she may feel in a sort of take-for-granted way, without thinking about it," said Letty. "But to tell the truth, I should feel it as impertinent of me to criticize Cousin Godfrey's person, as to pass an opinion on one of the books he reads. I cannot express the reverence I have for Cousin Godfrey."

"I don't wonder," replied Mary. "There is that about him one could trust."

"There is that about him," returned Letty, "makes me afraid of him—I cannot tell why. And yet, though everybody, even his mother, is as anxious to please him as if he were an emperor, he is the easiest person to please in the whole house. Not that he tells you he is pleased; he only smiles; but that is quite enough."

"But I suppose he talks to you sometimes?" said Mary.

"Oh, yes—now. He used not; but I think he does now more than to anybody else. It was a long time before he began though. Now he is always giving me something to read. I wish he wouldn't, it frightens me dreadfully. He always questions me, to know whether I understand what I read."

Letty ended with a little cry. Through the one nar-

row gap in the yew hedge, near to the arbour, Godfrey had entered the walk, and was coming towards them.

He was a well-made man, thirty years of age, rather tall, sun-tanned, and bearded, with wavy brown hair, and gentle approach. His features were not regular, but that is of little consequence where there is unity. His face indicated faculty and feeling, and there was much good nature, shadowed with memorial suffering, in the eyes which shone so blue out of the brown.

Mary rose respectfully as he drew near.

"What treason were you talking, Letty, that you were so startled at sight of me?" he said, with a smile. "You were complaining of me as a hard master, were you not?"

"No, indeed, Cousin Godfrey!" answered Letty energetically, not without tremor, and colouring as she spoke. "I was only saying I could not help being frightened when you asked me questions about what I had been reading. I am so stupid, you know!"

"Pardon me, Letty," returned her cousin. "I know nothing of the sort. Allow me to say you are very far from stupid. Nobody can understand everything at first sight. But you have not introduced me to your friend."

Letty bashfully murmured the names of the two.

"I guessed as much," said Wardour. "Pray sit down, Miss Marston. For the sake of your dresses, I will go and change my boots. May I come and join you after?"

"Please do, Cousin Godfrey; and bring something to read to us," said Letty, who wanted her friend to admire her cousin. "It's Sunday, you know."

"Why you should be afraid of him, I can't think," said Mary, when his retreating steps had ceased to sound on the gravel. "He is delightful!"

"I don't like to look stupid," said Letty.

"I shouldn't mind how stupid I looked so long as I

was learning," returned Mary. "I wonder you never told me about him!"

"I couldn't talk about Cousin Godfrey," said Letty; and a pause followed.

"How good of him to come to us again!" said Mary. "What will he read to us?"

"Most likely something out of a book you never heard of before, and can't remember the name of when you have heard it—at least that's the way with me. I wonder if he will talk to you, Mary. I should like to hear how Cousin Godfrey talks to girls."

"Why, you know how he talks to you," said Mary.

"Oh, but I am only Cousin Letty! He can talk anyhow to me."

"By your own account he talks to you in the best possible way."

"Yes; I daresay; but—"

"But what?"

"I can't help wishing sometimes he would talk a little nonsense. It would be such a relief. I am sure I should understand better if he would. I shouldn't be so frightened at him then."

"The way I generally hear gentlemen talk to girls makes me ashamed—makes me feel as if I must ask, 'Is it that you are a fool, or that you take that girl for one?' They never talk so to me."

Letty sat pulling a jonquil to pieces. She looked up. Her eyes were full of thought, but she paused a long time before she spoke, and when she did, it was only to say,—

"I fear, Mary, I should take any man for a fool who took me for anything else."

Letty was a rather small, and rather freckled girl, with the daintiest of rounded figures, a good forehead,

and fine clear brown eyes. Her mouth was not pretty, except when she smiled—and she did not smile often. When she did, it was not unfrequently with the tears in her eyes, and then she looked lovely. In her manner there was an indescribably taking charm, of which it is not easy to give an impression; but I think it sprang from a constitutional humility, partly ruined into a painful and haunting sense of inferiority, for which she imagined herself to blame. Hence there dwelt in her eyes an appeal which few hearts could resist. When they met another's, they seemed to say, "I am nobody; but you need not kill me; I am not pretending to be anybody. I will try to do what you want, but I am not clever. Only I am sorry for it. Be gentle with me." To Godfrey, at least, her eyes spoke thus.

In ten minutes or so he reappeared, far at the other end of the yew walk, approaching slowly, with a book, in which he seemed thoughtfully searching as he came. When they saw him the girls instinctively moved farther from each other, making large room for him between them, and when he came up, he silently took the place thus silently assigned him.

"I am going to try your brains now, Letty," he said, and tapped the book with a finger.

"Oh, please don't!" pleaded Letty, as if he had been threatening her with a small amputation, or the loss of a front tooth.

"Yes," he persisted; "and not your brains only, Letty, but your heart, and all that is in you."

At this even Mary could not help feeling a little frightened; and she was glad there was no occasion for her to speak.

With just a word of introduction, Godfrey read Carlyle's translation of that finest of Jean Paul's dreams

in which he sets forth the condition of a godless universe all at once awakened to the knowledge of the causelessness of its own existence. Slowly, with due inflection and emphasis—slowly, but without pause for thought or explanation, he read to the end, ceased suddenly, and lifted his eyes.

"There, Letty," he said, "what do you think of that? There's a bit of Sunday reading for you!"

Letty was looking altogether perplexed, and not a little frightened.

"I don't understand a word of it," she answered, gulping back her tears.

He glanced at Mary. She was white as death, her lips quivered, and from her eyes shot a keen light that seemed to lacerate their blue.

"It is terrible!" she said, "I never read anything like that."

"There *is* nothing like it," he answered.

"But the author is a Unitarian, is he not?" remarked Mary—for she heard plenty of theology, if not much Christianity, in her chapel.

Godfrey looked at her, then at the book for a moment.

"That may merely seem, from the necessity of the supposition," he answered; and read again:—

"'Now sank from aloft a noble, high Form, with a look of uneffaceable sorrow, down to the Altar, and all the Dead cried out, 'Christ! is there no God?' He answered, 'There is none!' The whole Shadow of each then shuddered, not the breast alone; and one after the other all, in this shuddering, shook into pieces.'—You see," he went on, "that if there be no God, Christ can only be the first of men."

"I understand," said Mary.

"Do you really then, Mary?" said Letty, looking at her with wondering admiration.

"I only meant," answered Mary, "—but," she went on, interrupting herself, "I do think I understand it a little. If Mr. Wardour would be kind enough to read it through again!"

"With much pleasure," answered Godfrey, casting on her a glance of pleased surprise.

The second reading affected Mary more than the first —because, of course, she took in more. And this time a glimmer of meaning broke on the slower mind of Letty: as her cousin read the passage, "O, then came, fearful for the heart, the dead Children who had been awakened in the Churchyard, into the temple, and cast themselves before the high Form on the Altar, and said, 'Jesus, have we no Father?' And he answered, with streaming tears, 'We are all orphans, I and you; we are without Father!'"

—at this point Letty gave her little cry, then bit her lip, as if she had said something wrong.

All the time a great bee kept buzzing in and out of the arbour, and Mary vaguely wondered how it could be so careless.

"I can't be dead stupid after all, Cousin Godfrey," said Letty, with broken voice, when once more he ceased, and as she spoke, she pressed her hand on her heart, "for something kept going through and through me; but I cannot say yet I understand it.—If you will lend me the book," she continued, "I will read it over again before I go to bed."

He shut the volume, handed it to her, and began to talk about something else.

Mary rose to go.

"You will take tea with us, I hope, Miss Marston," said Godfrey.

But Mary would not. What she had heard was working in her mind with a powerful fermentation, and she longed to be alone. In the fields, as she walked, she would come to an understanding with herself.

She knew almost nothing of the higher literature, and felt like a dreamer who, in the midst of a well-known and ordinary landscape, comes without warning upon the mighty cone of a mountain, or the breaking waters of a boundless ocean.

"If one could but get hold of such things, what a glorious life it would be!" she thought. She had looked into a world beyond the present, and already in the present all things were new. The sun set as she had never seen him set before: it was only in grey and gold, with scarce a touch of purple and rose; the wind visited her cheek like a living thing, and loved her; the skylarks had more than reason in their jubilation. For the first time she heard the full chord of intellectual and emotional delight. What a place her chamber would be, if she could there read such things! How easy would it be then to bear the troubles of the hour, the vulgar humour of Mr. Turnbull, and the tiresome attentions of George! Would Mr. Wardour lend her the book? Had he other books as good? Were there many books to make one's heart go as that one did? She would save every penny to buy such books, if indeed such treasures were within her reach! Under the enchantment of her first literary joy, she walked home like one intoxicated with opium—a being possessed for the time with the awful imagination of a grander soul, and revelling in the presence of her loftier kin.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### GODFREY WARDOUR.

THE property of which Thornwick once formed a part, was then large and important; but it had, by not very slow degrees, generation following generation of unthrift, dwindled and shrunk and shrivelled, until at last it threatened to disappear from the family altogether, like a spark upon burnt paper. Then came one into possession who had some element of salvation in him: Godfrey's father not only held the poor remnant together, but, unable to add to it, improved it so greatly that at length, in the midst of the large properties around, it resembled the diamond that hearts a disc of inferior stones. Doubtless, could he have used his wife's money, he would have spent it on land; but it was under trustees for herself and her children, and indeed would not have gone far in the purchase of English soil.

Considerably advanced in years before he thought of marrying, he died while Godfrey, whom he intended bringing up to a profession, was yet a child; and his widow, carrying out his intention, had educated the boy with a view to the law. Godfrey, however, had positively declined entering on the studies special to a career he detested; nor was it difficult to reconcile his mother to the enforced change of idea, when she found that his sole desire was to settle down with her, and manage the two hundred acres his father had left him. He took his place in the county, therefore, as a yeoman-farmer—none the less a gentleman by descent, character, and education. But while in genuine culture and refinement the superior of all the landed proprietors in the neighbourhood, and knowing it, he was the superior of most of them in this

also, that he counted it no derogation from the dignity he valued, to put his hands upon occasion to any piece of work required about the place.

His nature was too large, however, and its needs therefore too many, to allow of his spending his energies on the property; and he did not brood over such things as, so soon as they become cares, become despicable. How much time is wasted in what is called thought, but is merely care—an anxious idling over the fancied probabilities of result! Of this fault, I say, Godfrey was not guilty—more however, I must confess, from healthful drawings in other directions, than from philosophy or wisdom: he was *a reader*—not in the sense of a man who derives intensest pleasure from the absorption of intellectual pabulum—one not necessarily so superior as some imagine to the *gourmet*, or even the *gourmand*:—in his reading Godfrey nourished certain of the higher tendencies of his nature—read with a constant reference to his own views of life, and the confirmation, change, or enlargement of his theories of the same; but neither did he read with the highest aim of all—the enlargement of reverence, obedience, and faith; for he had never turned his face full in the direction of infinite growth—the primal end of a man's being, who is that he may return to the Father, gathering his truth as he goes. Yet by the simple instincts of a soul undebased by self indulgence or low pursuits, he was drawn ever towards things lofty and good; and life went calmly on, bearing Godfrey Wardour towards middle age, unruffled either by anxiety or ambition.

To the forecasting affection of a mother, the hour when she must yield the first place both in her son's regards and in the house-affairs, could not but have often presented itself, in doubt and pain—perhaps dread.

Only as year after year passed, and Godfrey revealed no tendency towards marriage, her anxiety changed sides, and she began to fear lest with Godfrey the ancient family should come to an end. As yet, however, finding no response to covert suggestion, she had not ventured to speak openly to him on the subject. All the time, I must add, she had never thought of Letty either as thwarting or furthering her desires, for in truth she felt towards her as one on whom Godfrey could never condescend to look, save with the kindness suitable for one immeasurably below him. As to what might pass in Letty's mind, Mrs. Wardour had neither curiosity nor care; else she might possibly have been more considerate than fall into the habit of talking to her in such swelling words of maternal pride that, even if she had not admired him of herself, Letty could hardly escape coming to regard her Cousin Godfrey as the very first of men.

It added force to the veneration of both mother and cousin—for it was nothing less than veneration in either—that there was about Godfrey an air of the inexplicable, or at least the unknown, and therefore mysterious. This the elder woman, not without many a pang at her exclusion from his confidence, attributed, and correctly, to some passage in his life at the university; to the younger it appeared only as greatness self-veiled from the ordinary world: to such as she, could be vouchsafed only an occasional peep into the gulf of his knowledge, the grandeur of his intellect, and the imperturbability of his courage.

The passage in Godfrey's life to which I have referred as vaguely suspected by his mother, I need not present in more than merest outline: it belongs to my history only as a component part of the soil whence it springs, and as in some measure necessary to the understanding

of Godfrey's character.—In the last year of his college life he had formed an attachment, the precise nature of which I do not know. What I do know is, that the bonds of it were rudely broken, and of the story nothing remained but disappointment and pain, doubt and distrust. Godfrey had most likely cherished an overweening notion of the relative value of the love he gave; but being his, I am certain it was genuine—by that, I mean a love with no small element of the everlasting in it. The woman who can cast such a love from her, is not likely to meet with such another. But with this one I have nothing to do.

It had been well if he had been left with only a wounded heart, but in that heart lay wounded pride. He hid it carefully, and the keener in consequence grew the sensitiveness, almost feminine, which no stranger could have suspected beneath the manner he wore. Under that bronzed countenance, with its firm set mouth and powerful jaw—below that clear blue eye, and that upright easy carriage, lay a faithful heart haunted by a sense of wrong: he who is not perfect in forgiveness must be haunted thus; he only is free whose love for the human is so strong that he can pardon the individual sin; he alone can pray the prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses," out of a full heart. Forgiveness is the only cure of wrong. And hand in hand with Sense-of-injury walks ever the weak sister-demon Self-pity, so dear, so sweet to many! —both of them the children of Philautos, not of Agape. But there was no hate, no revenge, in Godfrey, and, I repeat, his weakness he kept concealed. It must have been in his eyes, but eyes are hard to read. For the rest, his was a strong poetic nature—a nature which half unconsciously turned ever towards the best, away from the mean judgments of common men, and with positive

loathing from the ways of worldly women. Never was peace endangered between his mother and him, except when she chanced to make use of some evil maxim which she thought experience had taught her, and the look her son cast upon her stung her to the heart, making her for a moment feel as if she had sinned what the theologians call the unpardonable sin. When he rose and walked from the room without a word, she would feel as if abandoned to her wickedness, and be miserable until she saw him again. Something like a spring-cleaning would begin and go on in her for some time after, and her eyes would every now and then steal towards her judge with a glance of awe and fearful apology. But, however correct Godfrey might be in his judgment of the worldly, that judgment was less inspired by the harmonies of the universe, than by the discords that had jarred his being, and the poisonous shocks he had received in the encounter of the noble with the ignoble. There was yet in him a profound need of redemption into the love of the truth for the truth's sake. He had the fault of thinking too well of himself—which who has not who thinks of himself at all, apart from his relation to the holy force of life, within yet beyond him? It was the almost unconscious, assuredly the undetected, self-approbation of the ordinarily righteous man, the defect of whose righteousness makes him regard himself as upright, but the virtue of whose uprightness will at length disclose to his astonished view how immeasurably short of rectitude he comes. At the age of thirty, Godfrey Wardour had not yet become so displeased with himself as to turn self-roused energy upon betterment; and until then all growth must be of doubtful result. The point on which the swift-revolving top of his thinking and feeling turned, was as yet his present conscious self, as a thing that was

and would be, not as a thing that had to become. Naturally the pivot had worn a socket, and such socket is sure to be a sore. His friends notwithstanding gave him credit for great imperturbability; but in such wilfully undemonstrative men the evil burrows the more insidiously that it is masked by a constrained exterior.

## CHAPTER V.

### GODFREY AND LETTY.

GODFREY, being an Englishman, and with land of his own, could not fail to be fond of horses. For his own use he kept two—an indulgence disproportioned to his establishment; for, although precise in his tastes as to equine toilette, he did not feel justified to the keeping of a groom for their use only. Hence it came that, now and then, strap and steel, as well as hide and hoof, would get partially neglected; and his habits in the use of his horses being fitful—sometimes, it would be midnight even, when he scoured from his home, seeking the comfort of desert as well as solitary places—it is not surprising if at times, going to the stable to saddle one, he should find its gear not in the spick-and-span condition alone to his mind. It might then well happen there was no one near to help him, and there be nothing for it but to put his own hands to the work: he was too just to rouse one who might be nowise to blame, or send a maid to fetch him from field or barn, where he might be more importantly engaged.

One night, meaning to start for a long ride early in the morning, he had gone to the stable to see how things were; and soon after, it happened that Letty, attending to

some duty before going to bed, caught sight of him cleaning his stirrups: from that moment she took upon herself the silent and unsuspected supervision of the harness-room, where, when she found any part of the riding-equipments neglected, she would draw a pair of housemaid's gloves on her pretty hands, and polish away like a horseboy.

Godfrey had begun to remark how long it was since he had found anything unfit, and to wonder at the improvement somewhere in the establishment, when, going hastily one morning, some months before the date of my narrative, into the harness-room to get a saddle, he came upon Letty, who had imagined him afield with the men: she was energetic upon a stirrup with a chain-polisher. He started back in amazement, but she only looked up and smiled.

"I shall have done in a moment, Cousin Godfrey," she said, and polished away harder than before.

"But, Letty! I can't allow you to do things like that. What on earth put it in your head? Work like that is only for horny hands."

"Your hands ain't horny, Cousin Godfrey. They may be a little harder than mine—they wouldn't be much good if they weren't—but they're no fitter by nature to clean stirrups. Is it for me to sit with mine in my lap, and yours at this? I know better."

"Why shouldn't I clean my own harness, Letty, if I like?" said Godfrey, who could not help feeling pleased as well as annoyed: in this one moment Letty had come miles nearer him.

"Oh, surely! if you like, Cousin Godfrey," she answered; "but do you like?"

"Better than to see you doing it."

"But not better than I like to do it; that I am sure

of. It is hands that write poetry that are not fit for work like this."

"How do you know I write poetry?" asked Godfrey, displeased, for she touched here a sensitive spot.

"Oh, don't be angry with me!" she said, letting the stirrup fall on the floor, and clasping her great wash-leather gloves together; "I couldn't help seeing it was poetry, for it lay on the table, when I went to do your room."

"Do my room, Letty! Does my mother—?"

"She doesn't want to make a fine lady of me, and I shouldn't like it if she did. I have no head, but I have pretty good hands.—Of course, Cousin Godfrey, I didn't read a word of the poetry. I daredn't do that, however much I might have wished."

A childlike simplicity looked out of the clear eyes, and sounded in the swift words of the maiden; and had Godfrey's heart been as hard as the stirrup she had dropped, it could not but be touched by her devotion. He was at the same time not a little puzzled how to carry himself. Letty had picked up the stirrup, and was again hard at work with it: to take it from her, and turn her out of the saddle-room, would scarcely be a proper way of thanking her, scarcely an adequate mode of revealing his estimate of the condescension of her lady-hood. For, although Letty did make beds and chose to clean harness, Godfrey was gentleman enough not to think her less of a lady—for the moment at least—because of such doings: I will not say he had got so far on in the great doctrine concerning the washing of hands, as to be able to think her *more* of a lady for thus cleaning his stirrups. But he did see that to set the fire-engine of indignant respect for womankind playing on the individual woman, was not the part of the man to whose

service she was humbling herself. He laid his hand on her bent head, and said,—

"I ought to be a knight of the old times, Letty, to have a lady serve me so."

"You're just as good, Cousin Godfrey," she rejoined, rubbing away.

He turned from her, and left her at her work.

He had taken no real notice of the girl before—had felt next to no interest in her. Neither did he feel much now, save as owing her something beyond mere acknowledgment. But was there anything now he could do for her—anything in her he could help? He did not know. What she really was, he could not tell. She was a fresh, bright girl—that he seemed to have just discovered; and, as she sat polishing the stirrup, her hair shaken about her shoulders, she looked engaging; but whether she was one he could do anything for that was worth doing, was hardly the less a question for those discoveries.

"There must be *something* in the girl!" he said to himself—then suddenly reflected that he had never seen a book in her hand, except her prayer-book: how *was* he to do anything for a girl like that? For Godfrey knew no way of doing people good without the intervention of books. How could he get near one that had no taste for the quintessence of humanity? How was he to offer her the only help he had, when she desired no such help? "But," he continued, reflecting further, "she may have thirsted, may even now be athirst, without knowing that books are the bottles of the water of life!" Perhaps, if he could make her drink once, she would drink again. The difficulty was, to find out what sort of spiritual drink would be most to her taste, and would most entice her to more. There must be some seeds lying cold and hard in her uncultured garden: what

water would soonest make them grow? Not all the waters of Damascus will turn mere sand sifted of eternal winds into fruitful soil; but Letty's soul could not be such. And then literature has seed to sow as well as water for the seed sown. Letty's foolish words about the hands that wrote poetry, showed a shadow of respect for poetry—except indeed the girl had been but making game of him, which he was far from ready to believe, and for which, he said to himself, her face was at the time much too earnest, and her hands much too busy: he must find out whether she had any instincts, any predilections, in the matter of poetry!

Thus pondering, he forgot all about his projected ride, and, going up to the study he had contrived for himself in the rambling roof of the ancient house, began looking along the backs of his books, in search of some suggestion of how to approach Letty: his glance fell on a beautifully bound volume of verse—a selection of English lyrics, made with tolerable judgment—which he had bought to give, but the very colour of which, every time his eye flitting along the book-shelves caught it, threw a faint sickness over his heart, preluding the memory of old pain and loss.

"It may as well serve some one," he said, and taking it down, carried it with him to the saddle-room.

Letty was not there, and the perfect order of the place somehow made him feel she had been gone some time. He went in search of her: she might be in the dairy.

That was the very picture of an old-fashioned English dairy—green-shadowy, dark, dank, and cool—floored with great irregular slabs, mostly of green serpentine, polished into smooth hollows by the feet of generations of mistresses and dairymaids. Its only light came through

a small window shaded with shrubs and ivy, which stood open, and let in the scents of bud and blossom, weaving a net of sweetness in the gloom, through which, like a silver thread, shot the twittering song of a bird, which had inherited the gathered carelessness and bliss of a long ancestry in God's aviary.

Godfrey came softly to the door, which he found standing ajar, and peeped in. There stood Letty, warm and bright in the middle of the dusky coolness. She had changed her dress since he saw her, and now, in a pink-rosebud print, with the sleeves tucked above her elbows, was skimming the cream in a great red-brown earthen pan. He pushed the door a little, and at its screech along the uneven floor, Letty's head turned quickly on her lithe neck, and she saw Godfrey's brown face and kind blue eyes where she had never seen them before. In his hand glowed the book: some of the stronger light from behind him fell on it, and it caught her eyes.

"Letty," he said, "I have just come upon this book in my library: would you care to have it?"

"You don't mean to keep for my own, Cousin Godfrey?" cried Letty, in sweet, childish fashion, letting the skimmer dive like a coot to the bottom of the milk-pool, and hastily wiping her hands in her apron. Her face had flushed rosy with pleasure, and grew rosier and brighter still as she took the rich morocco-bound thing from Godfrey's hand into her own. Daintily she peeped within the boards, and the gilding of the leaves responded in light to her smile.

"Poetry!" she cried, in a tone of delight. "Is it really for me, Cousin Godfrey? Do you think I shall be able to understand it?"

"You can soon settle that question for yourself," an-

swered Godfrey, with a pleased smile—for he augured well from this reception of his gift—and turned to leave the dairy.

"But, Cousin Godfrey!—please!" she called after him, "you don't give me time to thank you."

"That will do when you are certain you care for it," he returned.

"I care for it very *much*," she replied.

"How can you say that, when you don't know yet whether you will understand it or not?" he rejoined, and closed the door.

Letty stood motionless, the book in her hand illuminating the dusk with its gold, and warming its coolness with its crimson boards and silken linings. One poem after another she read, nor knew how the time passed, until the voice of her aunt in her ears warned her to finish her skimming, and carry the jug to the pantry. But already Letty had taken a little cream off the book also, and already, between the time she entered and the time she left the dairy, had taken besides a fresh start in spiritual growth.

The next day Godfrey took an opportunity of asking her whether she had found in the book anything she liked. To his disappointment she mentioned one of the few commonplace things the collection contained—a last-century production, dull and respectable, which, surely, but for the glamour of some pleasant association, the editor would never have included. Happily, however, he bethought himself in time not to tell her the thing was worthless: such a word, instead of chipping the shell in which the girl's faculty lay dormant, would have smashed the whole egg into a miserable albuminous mass. And he was well rewarded; for, the same day, in the evening, he heard her singing gaily over her work,

and listening discovered that she was singing verse after verse of one of the best ballads in the whole book. She had chosen with the fancy of pleasing Godfrey; she sang to please herself. After this discovery he set himself in earnest to the task of developing her intellectual life, and, daily almost, grew more interested in the endeavour. His main object was to make her think; and for the high purpose, chiefly but not exclusively, he employed verse.

The main obstacle to success he soon discovered to be Letty's exceeding distrust of herself. I would not be mistaken to mean that she had too little confidence in herself; of that no one can have too little. Self-distrust will only retard, while self-confidence will betray. The man ignorant in these things will answer me: "But you must have one or the other." "You must have neither," I reply. "You must follow the truth, and in that pursuit, the less one thinks about himself the pursuer the better. Let him so hunger and thirst after the truth, that the dim vision of it occupies all his being, and leaves no time to think of his hunger and his thirst. Self-forgetfulness in the reaching out after that which is essential to us is the healthiest of mental conditions. One has to look to his way, to his deeds, to his conduct—not to himself. In such losing of the false, or merely reflected, we find the true self. There is no harm in being stupid, so long as a man does not think himself clever; no good in being clever, if a man thinks himself so, for that is a short way to the worst stupidity. If you think yourself clever, set yourself to do something; then you will have a chance of humiliation.

With good faculties, and fine instincts, Letty was always thinking she must be wrong, just because it was she was in it—a lovely fault, no doubt, but a fault

greatly impeditive to progress, and tormenting to a teacher. She got on very fairly in spite of it, however; and her devotion to Godfrey, as she felt herself growing in his sight, increased almost to a passion. Do not misunderstand me, my reader. If I say anything grows to a passion, I mean, of course, the passion of that thing, not of something else. Here I no more mean that her devotion became what in novels is commonly called love, than, if I said ambition or avarice had grown to a passion, I should mean those vices had changed to love. Godfrey Wardour was at least ten years older than Letty; besides him, she had not a single male relative in this world—neither had she mother or sister on whom to let out her heart; while of Mrs. Wardour, who was more severe on her than on any else, she was not a little afraid: from these causes it came that Cousin Godfrey grew and grew in Letty's imagination, until he was to her everything great and good—her idea of him naturally growing as she grew herself under his influences. To her he was the heart of wisdom, the head of knowledge, the arm of strength.

But her worship was quiet, as the worship of maiden, in whatever kind, ought to be. She knew nothing of what is called love, except as a word, and from sympathy with the persons in the tales she read. Any remotest suggestion of its existence in her relation to Godfrey, she would have resented as the most offensive impertinence—an accusation of impossible irreverence.

By degrees Godfrey came to understand, but then only in a measure, with what a self-refusing, impressionable nature he was dealing; and as he saw, he became more generous towards her, more gentle and delicate in his ministration. Of necessity he grew more and more interested in her, especially after he had made the

discovery that the moment she laid hold of a truth—the moment, that is, when it was no longer another's idea, but her own perception—it began to sprout in her in all directions of practice. By nature she was not intellectually quick; but, because such was her character, the ratio of her progress was of necessity an increasing one.

If Godfrey had seen in his new relation to Letty a possibility of the revival of feelings he had supposed for ever extinguished, such a possibility would have borne to him purely the aspect of danger; at the mere idea of again falling in love, he would have sickened with dismay; and whether or not he had any dread of such a catastrophe, certain it is that he behaved to her more as a pedagogue than a cousinly tutor, insisting on a precision in all she did that might have gone far to rouse resentment and recoil in the mind of a less childlike woman. Just as surely, notwithstanding all that, however, did the sweet girl grow into his heart: it *could* not be otherwise. The idea of her was making a nest for itself in his soul—what kind of a nest, for long he did not know, and for long did not think to inquire. Living thus, like an elder brother with a much younger sister, he was more than satisfied, refusing, it may be, to regard the probability of intruding change. But how far any man and woman may have been made capable of loving without falling in love, can be answered only after question has yielded to history. In the meantime, Mrs. Wardour, who would have been indignant at the notion of any equal bond between her idolized son and her patronized cousin, neither saw, nor heard, nor suspected anything to rouse uneasiness.

Things were thus in the old house, when the growing affection of Letty for Mary Marston took form one day

in the request that she would make Thornwick the goal of her Sunday walk. She repented, it is true, the moment she had said the words, from dread of her aunt; but they had been said, and were accepted. Mary went, and the aunt difficulty had been got over. The friendship of Godfrey also had now run into that of the girls, and Mary's visits were continued with pleasure to all, and certainly with no little profit to herself; for where the higher nature cannot communicate the greater benefit, it will reap it. Her Sunday visit became to Mary the one foraging expedition of the week—that which going to church ought to be, and so seldom can be.

The beginning and main stay of her spiritual life was, as we have seen, her father, in whom she believed absolutely. From books and sermons she had got little good; for in neither kind had the best come nigh her. She did very nearly her best to obey, but without much perceiving the splendour of the thing required, or much feeling its might upon her own eternal nature. She was as yet, in relation to the gospel, much as the Jews were in relation to their law: they had not yet learned the gospel of their law, and she was yet only serving the law of the gospel. But she was making progress, in simple and pure virtue of her obedience. Show me the person ready to step from any, let it be the narrowest, sect of Christian Pharisees into a freer and holier air, and I shall look to find in that person the one of that sect who, in the midst of its darkness and selfish worldliness, mistaken for holiness, has been living a life more obedient than the rest.

And now was sent Godfrey to her aid, a teacher himself far behind his pupil, inasmuch as he was more occupied with what he was, than what he had to become: the weakest may be sent to give the strongest saving

help; even the foolish may mediate between the wise and the wiser; and Godfrey presented Mary to men greater than himself, whom in a short time she would understand even better than he. Book after book he lent her—now and then gave her one of the best—introducing her, with no special intention, to much in the way of religion that was good in the way of literature as well. Only where he delighted mainly in the literature, she delighted more in the religion. Some of my readers will be able to imagine what it must have been to a capable, clear-thinking, warm-hearted, loving soul like Mary, hitherto in absolute ignorance of any better religious poetry than the chapel hymn-book afforded her, to make acquaintance with George Herbert, with Henry Vaughan, with Giles Fletcher, with Richard Crashaw, with old Mason, not to mention Milton, and afterwards our own Father Newman and Father Faber.

But it was by no means chiefly upon such that Godfrey led the talk on the Sunday afternoons. A lover of all truly imaginative literature, his knowledge of it was large, nor confined to that of his own country, although that alone was at present available for either of his pupils. His seclusion from what is called the world, had brought him into larger and closer contact with what is really the world. The breakers upon reef and shore may be the ocean to some, but he who would know the ocean indeed must leave them afar, sinking into silence, and sail into wider and lonelier spaces. Through Godfrey, Mary came to know of a land never promised, yet open—a land of whose nature even she had never dreamed—a land of the spirit, flowing with milk and honey—a land of which the fashionable world knows little more than the dwellers in the back slums, although it imagines it lying, with the kingdoms of the earth, at its feet.

As regards her feeling towards her new friend, this opener of unseen doors, the greatness of her obligation to him wrought against presumption and any possible folly. Besides, Mary was one who possessed power over her own spirit—rare gift, given to none but those who do something towards the taking of it. She was able in no small measure to order her own thoughts. Without any theory of self-rule, she yet ruled her Self. She was not one to slip about in the saddle, or let go the reins for a kick and a plunge or two. There was the thing that should be, and the thing that should not be; the thing that was reasonable, and the thing that was absurd. Add to all this, that she believed she saw in Mr. Wardour's behaviour to his cousin, in the careful gentleness evident through all the severity of the schoolmaster, the presence of a deeper feeling, that might one day blossom to the bliss of her friend; and we need not wonder if Mary's heart remained calm in the very floods of its gratitude; while the truth she gathered by aid of the intercourse, enlarging her strength, enlarged likewise the composure that comes of strength. She did not even trouble herself much to show Godfrey her gratitude. We may spoil gratitude as we offer it, by insisting on its recognition. To receive honestly is the best thanks for a good thing.

Nor was Godfrey without payment for what he did: the revival of ancient benefits, a new spring-time of old flowers, and the fresh quickening of one's own soul, are the spiritual wages of every spiritual service. In giving, a man receives more than he gives, and the *more* is in proportion to the worth of the thing given.

Mary did not encourage Letty to call at the shop, because the rudeness of the Turnbulls was certain to break out on her departure, as it did one day that Godfrey, dismounting at the door, and entering the shop in

quest of something for his mother, naturally shook hands with Mary over the counter. No remark was made so long as her father was in the shop, for, with all their professed contempt of him and his ways, the Turnbulls stood curiously in awe of him: no one could tell what he might or might not do, seeing they did not in the least understand him; and there were reasons for avoiding offence. But the moment he retired, which he always did earlier than the rest, the small arms of the enemy began to go off, causing Mary a burning cheek and indignant heart. Yet the great desire of Mr. Turnbull was a match between George and Mary, for that would, whatever might happen, secure the Marston money to the business. Their evil report Mary did not carry to her father. She scorned to trouble his lofty nature with her small annoyances; neither could they long keep down the well-spring of her own peace, which, deeper than anger could reach, soon began to rise again fresh in her spirit, fed from that water of life which underlies all care. In a few moments it had cooled her cheek, stilled her heart, and washed the wounds of offence.

## CHAPTER VI.

### TOM HELMER.

When Tom Helmer's father died, his mother, who had never been able to manage him, sent him to school to get rid of him, lamented his absence till he returned, then writhed and fretted under his presence until again he went. Never thereafter did those two, mother and son, meet, whether from a separation of months or of hours, without at once tumbling into an obstinate dif-

ference. When the youth was at home, their sparring, to call it by a mild name, went on from morning to night, and sometimes almost from night to morning. Primarily, of course, the fault lay with the mother; and things would have gone far worse, had not the youth, along with the self-will of his mother, inherited his father's good nature. At school he was a great favourite, and mostly had his own way, both with boys and masters, for, although a fool, he was a pleasant fool, clever, fond of popularity, and complaisant with everybody—except always his mother, the merest word from whom would at once rouse all the rebel in his blood. In person he was tall and loosely knit, with large joints and extremities. His face was handsome and vivacious, expressing far more than was in him to express, and giving ground for expectation such as he had never met. He was by no means an ill-intentioned fellow, preferred doing well and acting fairly, and neither at school nor at college had got into any serious scrape. But he had never found it imperative to reach out after his own ideal of duty. He had never been worthy the name of student, or cared much for anything beyond the amusements the universities provide so liberally, except dabbling in literature. Perhaps his only vice was self-satisfaction—which few will admit to be a vice; remonstrance never reached him; to himself he was ever in the right, judging himself only by his sentiments and vague intents, never by his actions; that these had little correspondence never struck him; it had never even struck him that they ought to correspond. In his own eyes he did well enough, and a good deal better. Gifted not only with fluency of speech, that crowning glory and ruin of a fool, but with plausibility of tone and demeanour, a confidence that imposed both on himself and on others, and a certain dropsical

impressionableness of surface which made him seem and believe himself sympathetic, nobody could well help liking him, and it took some time to make one accept the disappointment he caused.

He was now in his twenty-first year, at home, pretending that nothing should make him go back to Oxford, and enjoying more than ever the sport of plaguing his mother. A soul-doctor might have prescribed for him a course of small-pox, to be followed by intermittent fever, with nobody to wait upon him but Mrs. Gamp: after that, his mother might have had a possible chance with him, and he with his mother. But, unhappily, he had the best of health—supreme blessing in the eyes of the fool whom it enables to be a worse fool still; and was altogether the true son of his mother, who consoled herself for her absolute failure in his moral education, with the reflection that she had reared him sound in wind and limb. Plaguing his mother, amusing himself as best he could, riding about the country on a good mare, of which he was proud, he was living in utter idleness, affording occasion for much wonder that he had never yet disgraced himself. He talked to everybody who would talk to him, and made acquaintance with anybody on the spur of the moment's whim. He would sit on a log with a gypsy, and bamboozle him with lies made for the purpose, then thrash him for not believing them. He called here and called there, made himself specially agreeable everywhere, went to every ball and evening party to which he could get admittance in the neighbourhood, and flirted with any girl who would let him. He meant no harm, neither had done much, and was imagined by most incapable of doing any. The strange thing to some was that he stayed on in the country, and did not go to London and run up bills for

his mother to pay; but the mare accounted for a good deal; and the fact that almost immediately on his late return he had seen Letty and fallen in love with her at first sight, accounted for a good deal more. Not since then, however, had he yet been able to meet her so as only to speak to her; for Thornwick was one of the few houses of the middle class in the neighbourhood where he was not encouraged to show himself. He was constantly, therefore, on the watch for a chance of seeing her, and every Sunday went to church in that same hope and no other. But Letty knew nothing of the favour in which she stood with him; for although Tom had, as we have heard, confessed to her friend Mary Marston his admiration of her, Mary had far too much good sense to make herself his ally in the matter.

## CHAPTER VII.

### DURNMELLING.

In the autumn, Mr. Mortimer of Durnmelling resolved to give a harvest-home to his tenants, and under the protection of the occasion to invite also a good many of his neighbours and of the townsfolk of Testbridge, whom he could not well ask to dinner: there happened to be a political expediency for something of the sort: America is not the only country in which ambition opens the door to mean doings on the part of such as count themselves gentlemen. Not a few on whom Lady Margaret had never called, and whom she would never in any way acknowledge again, were invited; nor did the knowledge of what it meant cause many of them to

decline the questionable honour—which fact carried in it the best justification of which the meanness and insult were capable. Mrs. Wardour accepted for herself and Letty; but in their case Lady Margaret did call, and in person give the invitation. Godfrey positively refused to accompany them. He would not be patronized, he said; "—and by an inferior," he added to himself.

Mr. Mortimer was the illiterate son of a literary father who had reaped both money and fame. The son spent the former, on the strength of the latter married an earl's daughter, and thereupon began to embody in his own behaviour his ideas of how a nobleman ought to carry himself; whence, from being only a small, he became an objectionable man, and failed of being amusing by making himself offensive. He had never manifested the least approach to neighbourliness with Godfrey, although their houses were almost within a stone's throw of each other. Had Wardour been an ordinary farmer, of whose presuming on the acquaintance there could have been no danger, Mortimer would doubtless have behaved differently; but as Wardour had some pretensions—namely, old family, a small, though indeed *very* small property of his own, a university education, good horses, and the habits and manners of a gentleman — the men scarcely even saluted when they met. The Mortimer ladies, indeed, had more than once remarked—but it was in solemn silence, each to herself only—how well the man sat, and how easily he handled the hunter he always rode; but not once until now had so much as a greeting passed between them and Mrs. Wardour. It was not therefore wonderful that Godfrey should not choose to accept their invitation. Finding, however, that his mother was distressed at having to go to the gathering without him, and far more exercised in

her mind than was needful as to what would be thought of his absence, and what excuse it would be becoming to make, he resolved to go to London a day or two before the event, and pay a long-promised visit to a clerical friend.

The relative situation of the houses—I mean the stone-and-lime houses—of Durnmelling and Thornwick, was curious; and that they had at one time formed part of the same property might have suggested itself to any beholder. Durnmelling was built by an ancestor of Godfrey's who, forsaking the old nest for the new, had allowed Thornwick to sink into a mere farmhouse, in which condition it had afterwards become the sole shelter of the withered fortunes of the Wardours. In the hands of Godfrey's father, by a continuity of judicious cares, and a succession of partial resurrections, it had been restored to something like its original modest dignity. Durnmelling, too, had in part sunk into ruin, and had been but partially recovered from it; still, it swelled important beside its antecedent Thornwick. Nothing but a deep haha separated the two houses, of which the older and smaller occupied the higher ground. Between it and the haha was nothing but grass—in front of the house fine enough and well enough kept to be called lawn, had not Godfrey's pride refused the word. On the lower, the Durnmelling side of the fence, were trees, shrubbery, and outhouses—the chimney of one of which, the laundry, gave great offence to Mrs. Wardour, when, as she said, wind and wash came together. But, although they stood so near, there was no lawful means of communication between the houses except the road; and the mile that implied was seldom indeed passed by any of the unneighbourly neighbours.

The father of Lady Margaret would at one time have

purchased Thornwick at twice its value; but the present owner could not have bought it at half its worth. He had of late been losing money heavily—whence, in part, arose that anxiety of Lady Margaret's not to keep Mr. Redmain fretting for his lunch.

The house of Durnmelling, new compared with that of Thornwick, was yet, as I have indicated, old enough to have passed also through vicissitudes, and a large portion of the original structure had for many years been nothing better than a ruin. Only a portion of one side of its huge square was occupied by the family, and the rest of that side was not habitable. Lady Margaret, of an ancient stock, had gathered from it only pride, not reverence; therefore, while she valued the old, she neglected it; and what money she and her husband at one time spent upon the house, was devoted to addition and ornamentation, nowise to preservation or restoration. They had enlarged both dining-room and drawing-rooms to twice their former size, when half the expense, with a few trees from a certain outlying oak-plantation of their own, would have given them a room fit for a regal assembly. For, constituting a portion of the same front in which they lived, lay roofless, open to every wind that blew, its paved floor now and then in winter covered with snow—an ancient hall, whose massy south wall was pierced by three lovely windows, narrow and lofty, with simple gracious tracery in their pointed heads. This hall connected the habitable portion of the house with another part, less ruinous than itself, but containing only a few rooms in occasional use for household purposes, or, upon necessity, for quite inferior lodgment. It was a glorious ruin, of nearly a hundred feet in length, and about half that in width, the walls entire, and broad enough to walk round upon in safety. Their top was accessible

from a tower, which formed part of the less ruinous portion, and contained the stair and some small rooms.

Once, the hall was fair with portraits and armour and arms, with fire and lights, and state and merriment; now the sculptured chimney lay open to the weather, and the sweeping winds had made its smooth hearth-stone clean as if fire had never been there. Its floor was covered with large flags, a little broken: these, in prospect of the coming entertainment, a few workmen were levelling, patching, replacing. For the tables were to be set here, and here there was to be dancing after the meal.

It was Miss Yolland's idea, and to her was committed the responsibility of its preparation and adornment for the occasion, in which Hesper gave her active assistance. With coloured blankets, with carpets, with a few pieces of old tapestry, and a quantity of old curtains, mostly of chintz, excellent in hues and design, all cunningly arranged for as much of harmony as could be had, they contrived to clothe the walls to the height of six or eight feet, and so gave the weather-beaten skeleton an air of hospitable preparation and respectful reception.

The day and the hour arrived. It was a hot autumnal afternoon. Borne in all sorts of vehicles, from a carriage and pair to a taxed cart, the guests kept coming. As they came, they mostly scattered about the place. Some loitered on the lawn by the flower-beds and the fountain; some visited the stables and the home-farm, with its cowhouses and dairy and piggeries; some the neglected greenhouses, and some the equally neglected old-fashioned alleys, with their clipped yews and their moss-grown statues. No one belonging to the house was anywhere visible to receive them, until the great bell at length summoned them to the plentiful meal spread in the

ruined hall. "The hospitality of some people has no roof to it," Godfrey said, when he heard of the preparations. "Ten people will give you a dinner, for one who will offer you a bed and a breakfast."

Then at last their host made his appearance, and took the head of the table: the ladies, he said, were to have the honour of joining the company afterwards. They were at the time—but this he did not say—giving another stratum of society a less ponderous, but yet tolerably substantial refreshment, in the dining-room.

By the time the eating and drinking were nearly over, the shades of evening had gathered; but even then some few of the farmers, capable only of drinking, grumbled at having their potations interrupted for the dancers. These were presently joined by the company from the house, and the great hall was crowded.

Much to her chagrin, Mrs. Wardour had a severe headache, occasioned by her working half the night at her dress, and was compelled to remain at home. But she allowed Letty to go without her, which she would not have done had she not been so anxious to have news of what she could not lift her head to see; she sent her with an old servant—herself one of the invited guests—to gather and report. The dancing had begun before they reached the hall.

Tom Helmer had arrived among the first, and had joined the tenants in their feast, faring well, and making friends, such as he knew how to make, with everybody in his vicinity. When the tables were removed, and the rest of the company began to come in, he went about searching anxiously for Letty's sweet face, but it did not appear; and when she did arrive, she stole in without his seeing her, and stood mingled with the crowd about the door.

It was a pleasant sight that met her eyes. The wide space was gaily illuminated with coloured lamps, disposed on every shelf, and in every crevice of the walls, some of them gleaming like glow-worms out of mere holes; while candles in sconces, and lamps on the window-sills and wherever they could stand, gave a light the more pleasing that it was not brilliant. Over head, the night-sky was spangled with clear pulsing stars, afloat in a limpid blue, vast even to awfulness in the eyes of such —were any such there?—as say to themselves that to those worlds also were they born. Outside, it was dark, save where the light streamed from the great windows far into the night. The moon was not yet up; she would rise in good time to see the scattering guests to their homes.

Tom's heart had been sinking, for he could see Letty nowhere. Now at last, he had been saying to himself all the day, had come his chance! and his chance seemed but to mock him. More than any girl he had ever seen, had Letty moved him—perhaps because she was more unlike his mother. He knew nothing, it is true, or next to nothing, of her nature; but that was of little consequence to one who knew nothing, and never troubled himself to know anything, of his own. Was he doomed never to come near his idol?—Ah, there she was! Yes; it was she—all but lost in a humble group near the door! His foolish heart—not foolish in that—gave a great bound, as if it would leap to her where she stood. She was dressed in white muslin, from which her white throat rose warm and soft. Her head was bent forward, and a gentle dissolved smile was over all her face, as with loveliest eyes she watched eagerly the motions of the dance, and her ears drank in the music of the yeomanry band. He seized the first opportunity of getting nearer

to her. He had scarcely spoken to her before, but that did not trouble Tom. Even in a more ceremonious assembly, that would never have abashed him; and here there was little form, and much freedom. He had, besides, confidence in his own carriage and manners—which indeed were those of a gentleman—and knew himself not likely to repel by his approach.

Mr. Mortimer had opened the dancing by leading out the wife of his principal tenant, a handsome matron, whose behaviour and expression were such as to give a safe, home-like feeling, to the shy and doubtful of the company. But Tom knew better than injure his chance by precipitation: he would wait until the dancing was more general, and the impulse to movement stronger, and then offer himself. He stood therefore near Letty for some little time, talking to everybody, and making himself agreeable, as was his wont, all round; then at last, as if he had just caught sight of her, walked up to her where she stood flushed and eager, and asked her to favour him with her hand in the next dance.

By this time Letty had got familiar with his presence, had recalled her former meeting with him, had heard his name spoken by not a few who evidently liked him, and was quite pleased when he asked her to dance with him.

In the dance, nothing but commonplaces passed between them; but Tom had a certain pleasant way of his own in saying the commonest, emptiest things—an off-hand, glancing, skimming, swallow-like way of brushing and leaving a thing, as if he "could an' if he would," which made it seem for the moment as if he had said something: were his companion capable of discovering the illusion, there was no time; Tom was instantly away, carrying him or her with him, to something else. But there was better than this—there was poetry, more than

one element of it, in Tom. In the presence of a girl that pleased him, there would rise in him a poetic atmosphere, full of a rainbow kind of glamour, which, first possessing himself, passed out from him and called up a similar atmosphere, a similar glamour, about many of the girls he talked to. This he could no more help than the grass can help smelling sweet after the rain.

Tom was a finely projected, well-built, unfinished, barely furnished house, with its great central room empty, where the devil, coming and going at his pleasure, had not yet begun to make any great racket. There might be endless embryonic evil in him, but Letty was aware of no repellent atmosphere about him, and did not shrink from his advances. He pleased her, and why should she not be pleased with him? Was it a fault to be easily pleased? The truer and sweeter any human self, the readier is it to be pleased with another self—save indeed something in it grate on the moral sense: that jars through the whole harmonious hypostasy. To Tom, therefore, Letty responded with smiles and pleasant words, even grateful to such a fine youth for taking notice of her small self.

The sun had set in a bank of cloud, which, as if he had been a lump of leaven to it, immediately began to swell and rise, and now hung dark and thick over the still, warm night. Even the farmers were unobservant of the change: their crops were all in, they had eaten and drunk heartily, and were merry, looking on or sharing in the multiform movement, their eyes filled with light and colour.

Suddenly came a torrent sound in the air, heard of few and heeded by none, and straight into the hall rushed upon the gay company a deluge of rain, mingled with large, half-melted hailstones. In a moment or two

scarce a light was left burning, except those in the holes and recesses of the walls. The merrymakers scattered like flies—into the house, into the tower, into the sheds and stables in the court behind, under the trees in front —anywhere out of the hall, where shelter was none from the perpendicular, abandoned downpour.

At the moment, Letty was dancing with Tom, and her hand happened to be in his. He clasped it tight, and, as quickly as the crowd and the confusion of shelter-seeking would permit, led her to the door of the tower already mentioned. But many had run in the same direction, and already its lower story and stair were crowded with refugees—the elder bemoaning the sudden change, and folding tight around them what poor wraps they were fortunate enough to have retained; the younger merrier than ever, notwithstanding the cold gusts that now poked their spirit-arms hither and thither through the openings of the half-ruinous building: to them even the destruction of their finery was but added cause of laughter. But a few minutes before its freshness had been a keen pleasure to them, brightening their consciousness with a rare feeling of perfection: now crushed and rumpled, soiled and wet and torn, it was still fuel to the fire of gaiety. But Tom did not stay among them. He knew the place well; having a turn for scrambling, he had been all over it many a time. On through the crowd, he led Letty up the stair to the first floor. Even here were a few couples talking and laughing in the dark. With a warning, by no means unnecessary, to mind where they stepped, for the floors were bad, he passed on to the next stair.

"Let us stop here, Mr. Helmer," said Letty. "There is plenty of room here."

"I want to show you something," answered Tom.

"You need not be frightened. I know every nook of the place."

"I am not frightened," said Letty, and made no further objection.

At the top of that stair they entered a straight passage, in the middle of which was a faint glimmer of light from an oval aperture in the side of it. Thither Tom led Letty, and told her to look through. She did so.

Beneath lay the great gulf, wide and deep, of the hall they had just left. This was the little window, high in its gable, through which, in far-away times, the lord or lady of the mansion could oversee at will whatever went on below.

The rain had ceased as suddenly as it came on, and already lights were moving about in the darkness of the abyss—one, and another, and another, was searching for something lost in the hurry of the scattering. It was a waste and dismal show. Neither of them had read Dante; but Letty may have thought of the hall of Belshazzar, the night after the hand-haunted revel, when the Medes had had their will; for she had but lately read the story. A strange fear came upon her, and she drew back with a shudder.

"Are you cold?" said Tom. "Of course you must be, with nothing but that thin muslin! Shall I run down and get you a shawl?"

"Oh, no! do not leave me, please. It's not that," answered Letty. "I don't mind the wind a bit; it's rather pleasant. It's only that the look of the place makes me miserable, I think. It looks as if no one had danced there for a hundred years."

"Neither any one has, I suppose, till to-night," said Tom. "What a fine place it would be if only it had a

roof to it! I can't think how any one can live beside it and leave it like that!"

But Tom lived a good deal closer to a worse ruin, and never spent a thought on it.

Letty shivered again.

"I'm quite ashamed of myself," she said, trying to speak cheerfully. "I can't think why I should feel like this—just as if something dreadful were watching me! I'll go home, Mr. Helmer."

"It will be much the safest thing to do: I fear you have indeed caught cold," replied Tom, rejoiced at the chance of accompanying her. "I shall be delighted to see you safe."

"There is not the least occasion for that, thank you," answered Letty. "I have an old servant of my aunt's with me—somewhere about the place. The storm is quite over now: I will go and find her."

Tom made no objection, but helped her down the dark stair, hoping, however the servant might not be found.

As they went, Letty seemed to herself to be walking in some old dream of change and desertion. The tower was empty as a monument, not a trace of the crowd left, which a few minutes before had thronged it. The wind had risen in earnest now, and was rushing about, like a cold wild ghost, through every cranny of the desolate place. Had Letty, when she reached the bottom of the stairs, found herself on the rocks of the sea-shore, with the waves dashing up against them, she would only have said to herself, "I knew I was in a dream!" But the wind having blown away the hail-cloud, the stars were again shining down into the hall. One or two forlorn-looking searchers were still there; the rest had scattered like the gnats. A few were already at home; some were

harnessing their horses to go, nor would wait for the man in the moon to light his lanthorn; some were already trudging on foot through the dark. Hesper and Miss Yolland were talking to two or three friends in the drawing-room; Lady Margaret was in her boudoir, and Mr. Mortimer smoking a cigar in his study.

Nowhere could Letty find Susan. She was in the farmer's kitchen behind. Tom suspected as much, but was far from hinting the possibility. Letty found her cloak, which she had left in the hall, soaked with rain, and thought it prudent to go home at once, nor prosecute her search for Susan farther. She accepted therefore Tom's renewed offer of his company.

They were just leaving the hall, when a thought came to Letty: the moon suddenly appearing above the horizon, had put it in her head.

"Oh," she cried, "I know quite a short way home!" and, without waiting any response from her companion, she turned, and led him in an opposite direction, round, namely, by the back of the court, into a field. There she made for a huge oak, which gloomed in the moonlight by the sunk fence parting the grounds. In the slow strength of its growth, by the rounding of its bole, and the spreading of its roots, it had so rent and crumbled the wall as to make through it a little ravine, leading to the top of the haha. When they reached it, before even Tom saw it, Letty turned from him, and was up in a moment. At the top she turned to bid him good night, but there he was, close behind her, insisting on seeing her safe to the house!

"Is this the way you always come?" asked Tom.

"I never was on Durnmelling land before," answered Letty.

"How did you find the short-cut, then?" he asked. "It certainly does not look as if it were much used."

"Of course not," replied Letty. "There is no communication between Durnmelling and Thornwick now. It was all ours once, though, Cousin Godfrey says. Did you notice how the great oak sends its biggest arm over our field?"

"Yes."

"Well, I often sit there under it, when I went to learn my lesson, and can't rest in the house; and that's how I know of the crack in the haha."

She said it in absolute innocence, but Tom laid it up in his mind.

"Are you at lessons still?" he said. "Have you a governess?"

"No," she answered, in a tone of amusement. "But Cousin Godfrey teaches me many things."

This made Tom thoughtful; and little more had been said, when they reached the gate of the yard behind the house, and she would not let him go a step farther.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE OAK.

In the morning, as she narrated the events of the evening, she told her aunt of the acquaintance she had made, and that he had seen her home. This information did not please the old lady, as, indeed, without knowing any reason, Letty had expected. Mrs. Wardour knew all about Tom's mother, or thought she did, and knew little good; she knew also that, although her son was a general favourite, her own son had a very poor opinion of him.

On these grounds, and without a thought of injustice to Letty, she sharply rebuked the poor girl for allowing such a fellow to pay her any attention, and declared that, if ever she permitted him so much as to speak to her again, she would do something which she left in a cloud of vaguest suggestion.

Letty made no reply. She was hurt. Nor was it any wonder if she judged this judgment of Tom by the injustice of the judge to herself. It was of no consequence to her, she said to herself, whether she spoke to him again or not; but had any one the right to compel another to behave rudely? Only what did it matter, since there was so little chance of her ever seeing him again! All day she felt weary and disappointed, and, after the merry-making of the night before, the household work was irksome. But she would soon have got over both weariness and tedium had her aunt been kind. It is true, she did not again refer to Tom, taking it for granted that he was done with; but all day she kept driving Letty from one thing to another, nor was once satisfied with anything she did, called her even an ungrateful girl, and before evening had rendered her more tired, mortified, and dispirited, than she had ever been in her life.

But the tormentor was no demon; she was only doing what all of us have often done, and ought to be heartily ashamed of: she was only emptying her fountain of bitter water. Oppressed with the dregs of her headache, wretched because of her son's absence, who had not been a night from home for years, annoyed that she had spent time and money in preparation for nothing, she had allowed the said cistern to fill to overflowing, and upon Letty it overflowed like a small deluge. Like some of the rest of us, she never reflected how balefully her evil mood might operate; and that all things work for good in the end,

will not cover those by whom come the offences. Another night's rest, it is true, sent the evil mood to sleep again for a time, but did not exorcise it; for there are demons that go not out without prayer, and a bad temper is one of them—a demon as contemptible, mean-spirited, and unjust, as any in the peerage of hell—much petted, nevertheless, and excused, by us poor lunatics who are possessed by him. Mrs. Wardour was a lady, as the ladies of this world go, but a poor lady for the kingdom of heaven: I should wonder much if she ranked as more than a very common woman there.

The next day all was quiet; and a visit paid Mrs. Wardour by a favourite sister whom she had not seen for months, set Letty at such liberty as she seldom had. In the afternoon she took the book Godfrey had given her, in which he had set her one of Milton's smaller poems to study, and sought the shadow of the Durnmelling oak.

It was a lovely autumn day, the sun glorious as ever in the memory of Abraham, or the author of Job, or the builder of the scaled pyramid at Sakkarah. But there was a keenness in the air notwithstanding, which made Letty feel a little sad without knowing why, as she seated herself to the task Cousin Godfrey had set her. She, as well as his mother, heartily wished he were home. She was afraid of him, it is true; but in how different a way from that in which she was afraid of his mother! His absence did not make her feel free, and to escape from his mother was sometimes the whole desire of her day.

She was trying hard, not altogether successfully, to fix her attention on her task, when a yellow leaf dropped on the very line she was poring over. Thinking how soon the trees would be bare once more, she brushed the leaf away, and resumed her lesson.

"To fill thy odorous lamp with deeds of light,"

she had just read once more, when down fell a second tree-leaf on the book-leaf. Again she brushed it away, and read to the end of the sonnet:—

"Hast gain'd thy entrance, virgin wise and pure."

What Letty's thoughts about the sonnet were, I cannot tell: how fix thought indefinite in words defined? But her angel might well have thought what a weary road she had to walk before she gained that entrance. But for all of us the road *has* to be walked, every step, and the uttermost farthing paid. The gate will open wide to welcome us, but it will not come to meet us. Neither is it any use to turn aside; it only makes the road longer and harder.

Down on the same spot fell the third leaf. Letty looked up. There was a man in the tree over her head. She started to her feet. At the same moment, he dropped on the ground beside her, lifting his hat as coolly as if he had met her on the road. Her heart seemed to stand still with fright. She stood silent, with white lips parted.

"I hope I haven't frightened you," said Tom. "Do forgive me," he added, becoming more aware of the perturbation he had caused her. "You were so kind to me the other night, I could not help wanting to see you again. I had no idea the sight of me would terrify you so."

"You gave me such a start!" gasped Letty, with her hand pressed on her heart.

"I was afraid of it," answered Tom; "but what could I do? I was certain, if you saw me coming, you would run away."

"Why should you think that?" asked Letty, a faint colour rising in her cheek.

"Because," answered Tom, "I was sure they would be telling you all manner of things against me. But there is no harm in me—really, Miss Lovel—nothing, that is, worth mentioning."

"I am sure there isn't," said Letty; and then there was a pause.

"What book are you reading, may I ask?" said Tom.

Letty had now remembered her aunt's injunctions and threats; but, partly from a kind of paralysis caused by his coolness, partly from its being impossible to her nature to be curt with any one with whom she was not angry, partly from mere lack of presence of mind, not knowing what to do, yet feeling she ought to run to the house, what should she do but drop down again on the very spot whence she had been scared! Instantly Tom threw himself on the grass at her feet, and there lay, looking up at her with eyes of humble admiration.

Confused and troubled, she began to turn over the leaves of her book. She supposed afterwards she must have asked him why he stared at her so, for the next thing she remembered was hearing him say,—

"I can't help it. You are so lovely!"

"Please don't talk such nonsense to me," she rejoined. "I am not lovely, and I know it. What is not true cannot please anybody."

She spoke a little angrily now.

"I speak the truth," said Tom, quietly and earnestly. "Why should you think I do not?"

"Because nobody ever said so before."

"Then it is quite time somebody should say so," returned Tom, changing his tone. "It may be a painful fact, but even ladies ought to be told the truth, and learn to bear it. To say you are not lovely would be a downright lie."

"I wish you wouldn't talk to me about myself!" said Letty, feeling confused and improper, but not altogether displeased that it was possible for such a mistake to be made. "I don't want to hear about myself. It makes me so uncomfortable! I am sure it isn't right: is it now, Mr. Helmer?"

As she ended, the tears rose in her eyes, partly from unanalyzed uneasiness at the position in which she found herself and the turn the talk had taken, partly from the discomfort of conscious disobedience. But still she did not move.

"I am very sorry if I have vexed you," said Tom, seeing her evident trouble. "I can't think how I've done it. I know I didn't mean to; and I promise you not to say a word of the kind again—if I can help it.—But tell me, Letty," he went on again, changing in tone and look and manner, and calling her by her name with such simplicity that she never even noticed it, "do tell me what you are reading, and that will keep me from *talking* about you—not from—the other thing, you know."

"There!" said Letty, almost crossly, handing him her book, and pointing to the sonnet, as she rose to go.

Tom took the book, and sprang to his feet. He had never read the poem, for Milton had not been one of his masters. He stood devouring it. He was doing his best to lay hold of it quickly, for there Letty stood, with her hand held out to take the book again, ready upon its restoration to go at once. Silent and motionless, to all appearance unhasting, he read and re-read. Letty was restless, and growing quite impatient; but still Tom read, a smile slow-spreading from his eyes over his face: he was taking possession of the poem, he would have said. But the shades and kinds and degrees of possession are innumerable; and not until we downright love a thing,

can we *know* we understand it, or rightly call it our own: Tom only admired this one; it was all he was capable of in regard to such at present. Had the whim for acquainting himself with it seized him in his own study, he would have satisfied it with a far more superficial interview; but the presence of the girl, with those eyes fixed on him as he read—his mind's eye saw them—was for the moment an enlargement of his being, whose phase to himself was a consciousness of ignorance.

"It is a beautiful poem," he said at last, quite honestly; and, raising his eyes, he looked straight in hers. There is hardly a limit to the knowledge and sympathy a man may have in respect of the finest things, and yet be a fool. Sympathy is not harmony. A man may be a poet even, and speak with the tongue of an angel, and yet be a very bad fool.

"I am sure it must be a beautiful poem," said Letty; "but I have hardly got a hold of it yet." And she stretched her hand a little farther, as if to proceed with its appropriation.

But Tom was not yet prepared to part with the book. He proceeded instead, in fluent speech and not inappropriate language, to set forth, not the power of the poem —that he both took and left as a matter of course—but the beauty of those phrases, and the turns of those expressions, which particularly pleased him—nor failing to remark that, according to the strict laws of English verse, there was in it one bad rime.

That point Letty begged him to explain, thus leading Tom to an exposition of the laws of rime, in which, as far as English was concerned, he happened to be something of an expert, partly from an early habit of scribbling in ladies' albums. About these surface affairs, Godfrey, understanding them better and valuing them more

than Tom, had yet taught Letty nothing, judging it premature to teach polishing before carving; and hence this little display of knowledge on the part of Tom impressed Letty more than was adequate—so much, indeed, that she began to regard him as a sage, and a compeer of her cousin Godfrey. Question followed question, and answer followed answer, Letty feeling all the time she *must* go, yet standing and standing, like one in a dream, who thinks he cannot, and certainly does not break its spell—for in the act only is the ability and the deed born. Besides, was she to go away and leave her beautiful book in his hand? What would Godfrey think if she did? Again and again she stretched out her own to take it, but, although he saw the motion, he held on to the book as to his best anchor, hurriedly turned its leaves by fits, and searching for something more to his mind than anything of Milton's. Suddenly his face brightened.

"Ah!" he said—and remained a moment silent, reading. "I don't wonder," he resumed, "at your admiration of Milton. He's very grand, of course, and very musical, too; but one can't be listening to an organ always. Not that I prefer merry music; that must be inferior, for the tone of all the beauty in the world is sad." Much Tom Helmer knew of beauty or sadness either! but ignorance is no reason with a fool for holding his tongue. "But there is the violin now!—that can be as sad as any organ, without being so ponderous. Hear this, now! This is the violin after the organ—played as only a master can!"

With this preamble, he read a song of Shelley's, and read it well, for he had a good ear for rhythm and cadence, and prided himself on his reading of poetry.

Now the path to Letty's heart through her intellect was neither open nor well trodden; but the song in ques-

tion was a winged one, and flew straight thither: there was something in the tone of it that suited the pitch of her spirit-chamber. And if Letty's heart was not easily found, it was the readier to confess itself when found. Her eyes filled with tears, and through those tears Tom looked large and injured. "He must be a poet himself to read poetry like that!" she said to herself, and felt thoroughly assured that her aunt had wronged him greatly. "Some people scorn poetry like sin," she said again. "I used myself to think it was only for children, until Cousin Godfrey taught me differently!"

As thus her thoughts went on interweaving themselves with the music, all at once the song came to an end. Tom closed the book, handed it to her, said, "Good morning, Miss Lovel," and ran down the rent in the haha; and before Letty could come to herself, she heard the soft thunder of hoofs on the grass. She ran to the edge, and looking over, saw Tom on his bay mare, at full gallop across the field. She watched him as he neared the hedge and ditch that bounded it, saw him go flying over, and lost sight of him behind a hazel copse. Slowly then she turned, and slowly she went back to the house and up to her room, vaguely aware that a wind had begun to blow in her atmosphere, although only the sound of it had yet reached her.

## CHAPTER IX.

### CONFUSION.

THEN first, and from that moment, Letty's troubles began. Up to this point neither she herself nor another could array troublous accusation or uneasy thought against

her; and now she began to feel like a very target, which exists but to receive the piercing of arrows. At first sight, and if we do not look a long way ahead of what people stupidly regard as the end when it is only a horizon, it seems hard that so much we call evil, and so much that *is* evil, should result from that unavoidable, blameless, fore-ordained, pre-constituted, and essential attraction which is the law of nature, that is the will of God, between man and woman. Even if Letty had fallen in love with Tom at first sight, who dares have the assurance to blame her? who will dare to say that Tom was blameworthy in seeking the society and friendship, even the love, of a woman whom in all sincerity he admired, or for using his wits to get into her presence, and detain her a little in his company? Reasons there are, infinitely deeper than any philosopher has yet fathomed, or is likely to fathom, why a youth such as he—foolish indeed, but not foolish in this—and a sweet and blameless girl such as Letty, should exchange regards of admiration and wonder. That which thus moves them, and goes on to draw them closer and closer, comes with them from the very source of their being, and is as reverend as it is lovely, rooted in all the gentle potencies and sweet glories of creation, and not unworthily watered with all the tears of agony and ecstasy shed by lovers since the creation of the world. What it is, I cannot tell; I only know it is *not* that which the young fool calls it, still less that which the old sinner thinks it.

As to Letty's disobedience of her aunt's extravagant orders concerning Tom, I must leave that to the judgment of the just, reminding them that she was taken by surprise, and that besides it was next to impossible to obey them. But Letty found herself very uncomfortable, because there now was that to be known of her, the know-

ledge of which would highly displease her aunt—for which very reason, if for no other, ought she not to tell her all? On the other hand, when she recalled how unkindly, how unjustly her aunt had spoken, when she confessed her new acquaintance, it became to her a question whether in very deed she *must* tell her all that had passed that afternoon. There was no smallest hope of any recognition of the act, surely more hard than incumbent, but severity and unreason: *must* she let the thing out of her hands, and yield herself a helpless prey—and that for good to none? Concerning Mrs. Wardour, she reasoned justly: she who is even once unjust cannot complain if the like is expected of her again.

But, supposing it remained Letty's duty to acquaint her aunt with what had taken place; and not forgetting that, as one of the old people, I have to render account of the young that come after me, and must be careful over their lovely dignities and fair duties, I yet make haste to assert, that the old people who make it hard for the young people to do right, may be twice as much to blame as those whom they arraign for a concealment whose very heart is the dread of their known selfishness, fierceness, and injustice. If children have to obey their parents or guardians, those parents and guardians are over them in the name of God, and they must look to it: if in the name of God they act the devil, that will not prove a light thing for their answer. The causing of the little ones to offend hangs a fearful woe about the neck of the causer. It were a hard, as well as a needless task, seeing there is One who judges, to set forth how far the child is to blame as towards the parent, where the parent first of all is utterly wrong, yea out of true relation, towards the child. Not therefore is the child free; obligation remains,—modified, it may be, but how difficult,

alas, to fulfil! And whether Letty and such as act like her, are *excusable* or not in keeping attentions paid them a secret, this sorrow for the good ones of them certainly remains, that, next to a crime, a secret is the heaviest as well as the most awkward of burdens to carry. It has to be carried always, and all about. From morning to night it hurts in tenderest parts, and from night to morning hurts everywhere. At any expense, let there be openness. Take courage, my child, and speak out. Dare to speak, I say, and that will give you strength to resist, should disobedience become a duty. Letty's first false step was here: she said to herself *I cannot*, and did not. She lacked courage—a want in her case not much to be wondered at, but much to be deplored, for courage of the true sort is just as needful to the character of a woman as of a man. Had she spoken, she might have heard true things of Tom, sufficient so to alter her opinion of him as, at this early stage of their intercourse, to alter the *set* of her feelings, which now was straight for him. It may be such an exercise of courage would have rendered the troubles that were now to follow unnecessary to her development. For lack of it, she went about from that time with the haunting consciousness that she was one who might be found out; that she was guilty of what would go a good way to justify the hard words she had so resented. Already the secret had begun to work conscious woe. She contrived, however, to quiet herself a little with the idea, rather than the resolve, that, as soon as Godfrey came home, she would tell him all, confessing too that she had not the courage to tell his mother. She was sure, she said to herself, he would forgive her, would set her at peace with herself, and be unfair neither to Mr. Helmer nor to her. In the meantime she would take care—and this was a real resolve, not a mere act con-

templated in the future—not to go where she might meet him again. Nor was the resolve the less genuine that, with the very making of it, rose the memory of that delightful hour more enticing than ever. How beautifully, and with what feeling, he read the lovely song! With what appreciation had he not expounded Milton's beautiful poem! Not yet was she capable of bethinking herself that it was but on this phrase and on that he had dwelt, on this and on that line and rhythm, enforcing their loveliness of sound and shape; while the poem, the really important thing, the drift of the whole—it was her own heart and conscience that revealed that to her, not the exposition of one who at best could understand it only with his brain. She kept to her resolve, nevertheless; and although Tom, leaving his horse now here now there, to avoid attracting attention, almost every day visited the oak, he looked in vain for the light of her approach. Disappointment increased his longing: what would he not have given to see once more one of those exquisite smiles break out in its perfect blossom! He kept going and going—haunted the oak, sure of some blessed chance at last. It was the first time in his life he had followed one idea for a whole fortnight.

At length Godfrey came. But although, all the time he was away, Letty had retained and contemplated with tolerable calmness the idea of making her confession to him, the moment she saw him she felt such confession impossible. It was a sad discovery to her. Hitherto Godfrey, and especially of late, had been the chief source of the peace and interest of her life, that portion of her life, namely, to which all the rest of it looked as its sky, its overhanging betterness—and now she felt before him like a culprit: she had done what he might be displeased with. Nay, would that were all! for she felt like a hypo-

crite: she had done that which she could not confess. Again and again, while Godfrey was away, she had flattered herself that the help the objectionable Tom had given her with her task would at once recommend him to Godfrey's favourable regard; but now that she looked in Godfrey's face, she was aware—she did not know why, but she was aware it would not be so. Besides, she plainly saw that the same fact would, almost of necessity, lead him to imagine there had been much more between them than was the case; and she argued with herself, that, now there was nothing, now that everything was over, it would be a pity if, because of what she could not help, and what would never be again, there should arise anything, however small, of a misunderstanding between her cousin Godfrey and her.

The moment Godfrey saw her, he knew that something was the matter; but there had been that going on in him which put him on a false track for the explanation. Scarcely had he, on his departure for London, turned his back on Thornwick, ere he found he was leaving one whom yet he could not leave behind him. Every hour of his absence he found his thoughts with the sweet face and ministering hands of his humble pupil. Therewith, however, it was nowise revealed to him that he was in love with her. He thought of her only as his younger sister, loving, clinging, obedient. So dear was she to him, he thought, that he would rejoice to secure her happiness at any cost to himself.—*Any* cost? he asked —and reflected. Yes, he answered himself—even the cost of giving her to a better man. The thing was sure to come, he thought—nor thought without a keen pang, scarcely eased by the dignity of the self-denial that would yield her with a smile. But such a crisis was far away, and there was no necessity for now contemplating it.

Indeed, there was no *certainty* it would ever arrive; it was only a possibility. The child was not beautiful, although to him she was lovely, and, being also penniless, was therefore not likely to attract attention; while, if her being unfolded under the genial influences he was doing his best to make powerful upon her, if she grew aware that by them her life was enlarging and being tenfold enriched, it was possible she might not be ready to fall in love, and leave Thornwick. He must be careful, however, he said to himself, quite plainly now, that his behaviour should lead her into no error. He was not afraid she might fall in love with him; he was not so full of himself as that; but he recoiled from the idea as from a humiliation, that she might imagine him in love with her. It was not merely that he had loved once for all, and, once deceived and forsaken, would love no more; but it was not for him, a man of thirty years, to bow beneath the yoke of a girl of eighteen—a child in everything except outward growth. Not for a moment would he be imagined by her a courtier for her favour.

Thus, even in the heart of one so far above ordinary men as Godfrey, and that in respect of the sweetest of child-maidens, pride had its evil place; and no good ever comes of pride, for it is the meanest of mean things, and no one but he who is full of it thinks it grand. For its sake this wise man was firmly resolved on caution; and so, when at last they met, it was no more with that *abandon* of simple pleasure with which he had been wont to receive her when she came knocking at the door of his study, bearing clear question or formless perplexity; and his restraint would of itself have been enough to make Letty, whose heart was now beating in a very thicket of nerves, at once feel it impossible to carry out her intent—impossible to confess to him any more than

to his mother; while Godfrey, on his part, perceiving her manifest shyness and unwonted embarrassment, attributed them altogether to his own wisely guarded behaviour, and, seeing therein no sign of loss of influence, continued his caution. Thus the pride which is of man mingled with the love which is of God, and polluted it. From that hour he began to lord it over the girl; and this change in his behaviour immediately reacted on himself, in the obscure perception that there might be danger to her in continued freedom of intercourse: he must therefore, he concluded, order the way for both; he must take care of her as well as of himself. But was it consistent with this resolve that he should, for a whole month, spend every leisure moment in working at a present for her—a written marvel of neatness and legibility?

Again, by this meeting askance, as it were, another disintegrating force was called into operation: the moment Letty knew she could not tell Godfrey, and that therefore a wall had arisen between him and her, that moment woke in her the desire, as she had never felt it before, to see Tom Helmer. She could no longer bear to be shut up in herself; she must see somebody, get near to somebody, talk to somebody; her secret would choke her otherwise, would swell and break her heart; and who was there to think of but Tom—and Mary Marston?

She had never once gone to the oak again, but she had not altogether avoided a certain little cobwebbed gable-window in the garret, from which it was visible; neither had she withheld her hands from cleaning a pane in that window, that through it she might see the oak; and there, more than once or twice, now thickening the huge limb, now spotting the grass beneath it, she had descried a dark object, which could be nothing else

than Tom Helmer on the watch for herself. He must surely be her friend, she reasoned, or how would he care, day after day, to climb a tree to look if she were coming —she who was the veriest nobody in all other eyes but his? It was so good of Tom! She *would* call him Tom; everybody else called him Tom, and why shouldn't she —to herself, when nobody was near? As to Mary Marston, she treated her like a child! When she told her that she had met Tom at Durnmelling, and how kind he had been, she looked as grave as if it had been wicked to be civil to him; and told her in return how he and his mother were always quarrelling: that must be his mother's fault, she was sure—it could not be Tom's; any one might see that at a glance! His mother must be something like her aunt! But after that, how could she tell Mary any more? It would not be fair to Tom, for, like the rest, she would certainly begin to abuse him. What harm could come of it? and if harm did, how could she help it! If they had been kind to her, she would have told them everything, but they all frightened her so, she could not speak. It was not her fault if Tom was the only friend she had! She *would* ask his advice; he was sure to advise her just the right thing. He had read that sonnet about the wise virgin, with such feeling and such force, he *must* know what a girl ought to do, and how she ought to behave to those who were unkind and would not trust her!

Poor Letty! she had no stay, no root in herself yet. Well do I know not one human being ought, even were it possible, to be enough for himself; each of us needs God and every human soul he has made, before he has enough; but we ought each to be able, in the hope of what is one day to come, to endure for a time, not having enough. Letty was unblamable that she desired

the comfort of humanity around her soul, but I am not sure that she was quite unblamable in not being fit to walk a few steps alone, or even to sit still and expect. With all his learning, Godfrey had not taught her what William Marston had taught Mary; and now her heart was like a child left alone in a great room. She had not yet learned that we must each bear his own burden, and so become able to bear each the burden of the other. Poor friends we are, if we are capable only of leaning, and able never to support!

But the moment Letty's heart had thus cried out against Mary, came a shock, and something else cried out against herself, telling her that she was not fair to her friend, and that Mary, and no other, was the proper person to advise with in this emergency of her affairs. She had no right to turn from her because she was a little afraid of her. Perhaps Letty was on the point of discovering that to be unable to bear disapproval was an unworthy weakness. But in her case it came nowise of the pride which blame stirs to resentment, but altogether of the self-depreciation which disapproval rouses to yet greater dispiriting. Praise was to her a precious thing in part because it made her feel as if she could go on; blame, a misery in part because it made her feel as if all was of no use, she never could do anything right. She had not yet learned that the right is the right, come of praise or blame what may. The right will produce more right and be its own reward—in the end a reward altogether infinite, for God will meet it with what is deeper than all right, namely, perfect love. But the more Letty thought, the more she was sure she must tell Mary; and disapprove as she might, Mary was a very different object of alarm from either her aunt or her cousin Godfrey.

The first afternoon, therefore, on which she thought her aunt could spare her, she begged leave to go and see Mary. Mrs. Wardour yielded it, but not very graciously. She had, indeed, granted that Miss Marston was not like other shop-girls, but she did not favour the growth of the intimacy, and liked Letty's going to her less than Mary's coming to Thornwick.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE HEATH AND THE HUT.

LETTY seldom went into the shop, except to buy, for she knew Mr. Turnbull would not like it, and Mary did not encourage it; but now her misery made her bold. Mary saw the trouble in her eyes, and without a moment's hesitation drew her inside the counter, and thence into the house, where she led the way to her own room, up stairs and through passages which were indeed lanes through masses of merchandise, like those cut through deep-drifted snow. It was shop all over the house, till they came to the door of Mary's chamber, which, opening from such surroundings, had upon Letty much the effect of a chapel—and rightly, for it was a room not unused to having its door shut. It was small, and plainly but daintily furnished, with no foolish excess of the small refinements on which girls so often set value, spending large time on what it would be waste to buy: only they have to kill the weary captive they know not how to redeem, for he troubles them with his moans.

"Sit down, Letty dear, and tell me what is the matter," said Mary, placing her friend in a chintz-covered straw-chair, and seating herself beside her.

Letty burst into tears, and sat sobbing.

"Come, dear, tell me all about it," insisted Mary. "If you don't make haste, they will be calling me."

Letty could not speak.

"Then I'll tell you what," said Mary; "you must stop with me to-night, that we may have time to talk it over. You sit here, and amuse yourself as well as you can, till the shop is shut, and then we shall have such a talk! I will send your tea up here. Beenie will be good to you."

"Oh, but indeed I can't!" sobbed Letty; "my aunt would never forgive me."

"You silly child! I never meant to keep you without sending to your aunt to let her know."

"She won't let me stop," persisted Letty.

"We will try her," said Mary confidently; and without more ado left Letty, and going to her desk in the shop, wrote a note to Mrs. Wardour. This she gave to Beenie to send by special messenger to Thornwick; after which, she told her, she must take up a nice tea to Miss Lovel in her bedroom. Mary then resumed her place in the shop, under the frowns and side-glances of Turnbull, and the smile of her father, pleased at her reappearance from even such a short absence.

But the return, in an hour or so, of the boy-messenger, whom Beenie had taken care not to pay beforehand, destroyed the hope of a pleasant evening; for he brought a note from Mrs. Wardour, absolutely refusing to allow Letty to spend the night from home: she must return immediately, so as to get in before dark.

The rare anger flushed Letty's cheek, and flashed from her eyes, as she read; for, in addition to the prime annoyance, her aunt's note was addressed to her and not to Mary, to whom it did not even allude. Mary only smiled inwardly at this, but Letty felt deeply hurt, and

her displeasure with her aunt added yet a shade to the dimness of her judgment. She rose at once.

"Will you not tell me first what is troubling you, Letty?" said Mary.

"No, dear, not now," replied Letty, caring a good deal less about the right ordering of her way than when she entered the house. Why should she care, she said to herself—but it was her anger speaking in her—how she behaved, when she was treated so abominably?

"Then I will come and see you on Sunday," said Mary; "and then we shall manage to have our talk."

They kissed and parted—Letty unaware that she had given her friend a less warm kiss than usual. There can hardly be a plainer proof of the lowness of our nature until we have laid hold of the higher nature that belongs to us by birthright, than this, that even a just anger tends to make us unjust and unkind: Letty was angry with every person and thing at Thornwick, and unkind to her best friend, for whose sake in part she was angry. With glowing cheeks, tear-filled eyes, and indignant heart, she set out on her walk home.

It was a still evening, with a great cloud rising in the south-west; from which, as the sun drew near the horizon, a thin veil stretched over the sky between, and a few drops came scattering. This was in harmony with Letty's mood. Her soul was clouded, and her heaven was only a place for the rain to fall from. Annoyance, doubt, her new sense of constraint, and a wide-reaching, undefined feeling of homelessness, all wrought together to make her mind a chaos out of which misshapen things might rise, instead of an ordered world in which gracious and reasonable shapes appear. For as the place such will be the thoughts that spring there; when all in us is

peace divine, then, and not till then, shall we think the absolutely reasonable. Alas, that by our thoughtlessness or unkindness, we should so often be the cause of monster-births, and those even in the minds of the loved! that we should be, if but for a moment, the demons that deform a fair world that loves us! Such was Mrs. Wardour, with her worldly wisdom, that day to Letty.

About half-way to Thornwick, the path crossed a little heathy common; and just as Letty left the hedge-guarded field-side, and through a gate stepped, as it were afresh out of doors, on the open common, the wind came with a burst, and brought the rain in earnest. It was not yet very heavy, but heavy enough, with the wind at its back, and she with no defence but her parasol, to wet her thoroughly before she could reach any shelter, the nearest being a solitary decrepit old hawthorn tree, about half-way across the common. She bent her head to the blast, and walked on. She had no desire for shelter. She would like to get wet to the skin, take a violent cold, go into a consumption, and die in a fortnight. The wind whistled about her bonnet, dashed the rain-drops clanging on the drum-tight silk of her parasol, and made of her skirts fetters and chains. She could hardly get along, and was just going to take down her parasol, when suddenly, where was neither house nor hedge nor tree, came a lull. For from behind, over head and parasol, had come an umbrella, and now came a voice and an audible sigh of pleasure.

"I little thought when I left home this afternoon," said the voice, "that I should have such a happiness before night!"

At the sound of the voice Letty gave a cry, which ran through all the shapes of alarm, of surprise, of delight; and it was not much of a cry either.

"Oh, Tom!" she said, and clasped the arm that held the umbrella. How her foolish heart bounded! Here was help when she had sought none, and where least she had hoped for any! Her aunt would have her run from under the umbrella at once, no doubt, but she would do as she pleased this time. Here was Tom getting as wet as a spaniel for her sake, and counting it a happiness! Oh, to have a friend like that—all to herself! She would not reject such a friend for all the aunts in creation. Besides, it was her aunt's own fault: if she had let her stay with Mary, she would not have met Tom. It was not her doing; she would take what was sent her, and enjoy it! But at the sound of her own voice calling him Tom, the blood rushed to her cheeks, and she felt their glow in the heart of the chill-beating rain.

"What a night for you to be out in, Letty!" responded Tom, taking instant advantage of the right she had given him. "How lucky it was I chose the right place to watch in at last! I was sure, if only I persevered long enough, I should be rewarded."

"Have you been waiting me long?" asked Letty, with foolish acceptance.

"A fortnight and a day," answered Tom, with a laugh. "But I would wait a long year for such another chance as this." And he pressed to his side the hand upon his arm. "Fate is indeed kind to night."

"Hardly in the weather," said Letty, fast recovering her spirits.

"Not?" said Tom, with seeming pretence of indignation. "Let any one but yourself dare to say a word against the weather of this night, and he will have me to reckon with. It's the sweetest weather I ever walked

in. I will write a glorious song in praise of showery gusts and bare commons."

"Do," said Letty, careful not to say Tom this time, but unwilling to revert to Mr. Helmer; "and mind you bring in the umbrella."

"That I will! See if I don't!" answered Tom.

"And make it real poetry too?" asked Letty, looking archly round the stick of the umbrella.

"Thou shalt thyself be the lovely critic, fair maiden!" answered Tom.

And thus they were already on the footing of somewhere about a two years' acquaintance—thanks to the smart of ill-usage in Letty's bosom, the gaiety in Tom's, the sudden wild weather, the quiet heath, the gathering shades, and the umbrella! The wind blew cold, the air was dank and chill, the west was a low gleam of wet yellow, and the rain shot stinging in their faces; but Letty cared quite as little for it all as Tom did, for her heart, growing warm with the comfort of the friendly presence, felt like a banished soul that has found a world; and a joy as of endless deliverance pervaded her being. And neither to her nor to Tom must we deny our sympathy in the pleasure which, walking over a bog, they drew from the flowers that mantled awful deeps: they will not sink until they stop, and begin to build their house upon it. Within that umbrella, hovered, and glided with them, an atmosphere of bliss and peace and rose-odours. In the midst of storm and coming darkness, it closed warm and genial around the pair. Tom meditated no guile, and Letty had no deceit in her. Yet was Tom no true man, or sweet Letty much of a woman. Neither of them was yet *of the truth*.

At the other side of the heath, almost upon the path, stood a deserted hut; door and window were gone, but

the roof remained: just as they neared it, the wind fell, and the rain began to come down in earnest.

"Let us go in here for a moment," said Tom, "and get our breath for a new fight."

Letty said nothing, but Tom felt she was reluctant.

"Not a soul will pass to-night," he said. "We mustn't get wet to the skin."

Letty felt, or fancied, refusal would be more unmaidenly than consent, and allowed Tom to lead her in. And there, within those dismal walls, the twilight sinking into a cheerless night of rain, encouraged by the very dreariness and obscurity of the place, she told Tom the trouble of mind their interview at the oak was causing her, saying that now it would be worse than ever, for it was altogether impossible to confess that she had met him yet again that evening.

So now, indeed, Letty's foot was in the snare: she had a secret with Tom. Every time she saw him, liberty had withdrawn a pace. There was no room for confession now. If a secret held be a burden, a secret shared is a fetter. But Tom's heart rejoiced within him.

"Let me see!—How old are you, Letty?" he asked gaily.

"Eighteen past," she answered.

"Then you are fit to judge for yourself. You ain't a child, and they are not your father and mother. What right have they to know everything you do? I wouldn't let any such nonsense trouble me."

"But they give me everything, you know—food, and clothes, and all."

"Ah, just so!" returned Tom. "And what do you do for them?"

"Nothing."

"Why! what are you about all day?"

Letty gave him a brief sketch of her day.

"And you call that nothing?" exclaimed Tom. "Ain't that enough to pay for your food and your clothes? Does it want your private affairs to make up the difference? Or have you to pay for your food and clothes with your very thoughts?—What pocket-money do they give you?"

"Pocket-money?" returned Letty, as if she did not quite know what he meant.

"Money to do what you like with," explained Tom.

Letty thought for a moment.

"Cousin Godfrey gave me a sovereign last Christmas," she answered. "I have got ten shillings of it yet."

Tom burst into a merry laugh.

"Oh you dear creature!" he cried. "What a sweet slave you make! The lowest servant on the farm gets wages, and you get none; yet you think yourself bound to tell them everything, because they give you food and clothes, and a sovereign last Christmas!"

Here a gentle displeasure arose in the heart of the girl, hitherto so contented and grateful. She did not care about money, but she resented the claim her conscience made for them upon her confidence. She did not reflect that such claim had never been made by them; nor that the fact that she felt the claim, proved that she had been treated, in some measure at least, like a daughter of the house.

"Why," continued Tom, "it is mere, downright, rank slavery! You are walking to the sound of your own chains. Of course you are not to do anything wrong, but you are not bound not to do anything they may happen not to like."

In this style he went on, believing he spoke the truth, and was teaching her to show a proper spirit. His heart, as well as Godfrey's, was uplifted, to think he had this

lovely creature to direct and superintend: through her sweet confidence, he had to set her free from unjust oppression taking advantage of her simplicity. But in very truth he was giving her just the instruction that goes to make a slave—the slave in heart, who serves without devotion, and serves unworthily. Yet in this, and much more such poverty-stricken, swine-husk argument, Letty seemed to hear a gospel of liberty, and scarcely needed the following injunctions of Tom, to make a firm resolve not to utter a word concerning him. To do so would be treacherous to him, and would be to forfeit the liberty he had taught her! Thus from the neglect of a real duty, she became the slave of a false one.

"If you do," Tom had said, "I shall never see you again: they will set every one about the place to watch you, like so many cats after one poor little white mousey, and on the least suspicion, one way or another, you will be gobbled up, as sure as fate, before you can get to me to take care of you."

Letty looked up at him gratefully.

"But what could you do for me if I did?" she asked. "If my aunt were to turn me out of the house, your mother would not take me in!"

Letty was not herself now; she was herself and Tom —by no means a healthful combination.

"My mother won't be mistress long," answered Tom. "She will have to do as I bid her when I am one and twenty, and that will be in a few months."—Tom did not know the terms of his father's will.—"In the meantime we must keep quiet, you know. I don't want a row —we have plenty of row as it is. You may be sure *I* shall tell no one how I spent the happiest hour of my life.—How little circumstance has to do with bliss!" he added, with a philosophical sigh. "Here we are in a

wretched hut, roared and rained upon by an equinoctial tempest, and I am in paradise!"

"I must go home," said Letty, recalled to a sense of her situation, yet set trembling with pleasure, by his words. "See, it is getting quite dark!"

"Don't be afraid, my white bird," said Tom. "I will see you home. But surely you are as well here as there anyhow! Who knows when we shall meet again! Don't be alarmed; I'm not going to ask you to meet me anywhere; I know your sweet innocence would make you fancy it wrong, and then you would be unhappy. But that is no reason why I should not fall in with you when I have the chance. It is very hard that two people who understand each other, cannot be friends without other people shoving in their ugly beaks! Where is the harm to any one if we choose to have a few minutes' talk together now and then?"

"Where indeed?" responded Letty shyly.

A tall shadow—no shadow either, but the very person of Godfrey Wardour—passed the opening in the wall of the hut where once had been a window, and the gloom it cast into the dusk within was awful and ominous. The moment he saw it, Tom threw himself flat on the clay floor of the hut. Godfrey stopped at the doorless entrance, and stood on the threshold, bending his head to clear the lintel as he looked in. Letty's heart seemed to vanish from her body. A strange feeling shook her, as if some mysterious transformation were about to pass upon her whole frame, and she were about to be changed into some one of the lower animals. The question, where was the harm, late so triumphantly put, seemed to have no heart in it now. For a moment that had to Letty the air of an aeon, Godfrey stood peering.

Not a little to his displeasure, he had heard from his

mother of her refusal to grant Letty's request, and had set out in the hope of meeting and helping her home, for by that time it had begun to rain, and looked stormy.

In the darkness he saw something white, and as he gazed it grew to Letty's face. The strange, scared, ghastly expression of it bewildered him.

Letty became aware that Godfrey did not recognize her at first, and the hope sprung up in her heart that he might not see Tom at all; but she could not utter a word, and stood returning Godfrey's gaze like one fascinated with terror. Presently her heart began again to bear witness in violent piston-strokes.

"Is it really you, my child?" said Godfrey, in an uncertain voice—for, if it was indeed she, why did she not speak, and why did she look so scared at the sight of him?

"Oh, Cousin Godfrey!" gasped Letty, then first finding a little voice, "you gave me such a start!"

"Why should you be so startled at seeing me, Letty?" he returned. "Am I such a monster of the darkness, then?"

"You came all at once," replied Letty, gathering courage from the playfulness of his tone, "and blocked up the door with your shoulders, so that not a ray of light fell on your face; and how was I to know it was you, Cousin Godfrey?"

From a paleness greyer than death, her face was now red as fire: it was the burning of the lie inside her. She felt all a lie now: there was the good that Tom had brought her! But the gloom was friendly. With a resolution new to herself, she went up to Godfrey and said,—

"If you are going to the town, let me walk with you, Cousin Godfrey. It is getting so dark."

She felt as if an evil necessity—a thing in which man must not believe—were driving her. But the poor child

was not half so deceitful inside as the words seemed to her issuing from her lips. It was such a relief to be assured Godfrey had not seen Tom, that she felt as if she could forego the sight of Tom for evermore. Her better feelings rushed back, her old confidence and reverence; and in the altogether nebulochaotic condition of her mind, she felt as if, in his turn, Godfrey had just appeared for her deliverance.

"I am not going to the town, Letty," he answered. "I came to meet you, and we will go home together. It is no use waiting for the rain to stop, and about as little to put up an umbrella. I have brought your waterproof, and we must just take it as it comes."

The wind was up again, and the next moment Letty, on Godfrey's arm, was struggling with the same storm she had so lately encountered leaning on Tom's, while Tom was only too glad to be left alone on the floor of the dismal hut, whence he did not venture to rise for some time, lest any the most improbable thing should happen, to bring Mr. Wardour back. He was as mortally afraid of being discovered as any young thief in a farmer's orchard.

He had a dreary walk back to the public-house where he had stabled his horse; but he trudged it cheerfully, brooding with delight on Letty's beauty, and her lovely confidence in Tom Helmer—a personage whom he had begun to feel nobody trusted as he deserved.

"Poor child!" he said to himself—he as well as Godfrey patronized her—"what a doleful walk home she will have with that stuck-up old bachelor fellow!"

Nor indeed was it a very comfortable walk home she had, although Godfrey talked all the way, as well as a head-wind, full of rain, would permit. A few weeks ago she would have thought the walk and the talk and every-

thing delightful. But after Tom's airy converse on the same level with herself, Godfrey's sounded indeed wise —very wise, but dull, so dull! It is true the suspicion, hardly awake enough to be troublous, lay somewhere in her, that in Godfrey's talk there was a value of which in Tom's there was nothing; but then it was not wisdom Letty was in want of, she thought, but somebody to be kind to her—as kind as she should like; somebody, though she did not say this even to herself, to pet her a little, and humour her, and not require too much of her. Physically Letty was not in the least lazy, but she did not enjoy being forced to think much. She could think, and to no very poor purpose either, but as yet she had no hunger for the possible results of thought, and how then could she care to think? Seated on the edge of her bed, weary and wet and self-accused, she recalled, and pondered, and, after her faculty, compared the two scarce comparable men, until the voice of her aunt, calling to her to make haste and come to tea, made her start up, and in haste remove her drenched garments. The old lady imagined from her delay she was out of temper because she had sent for her home; but when she appeared, she was so ready, so attentive, and so quick to help, that, a little repentant, she said to herself, "Really the girl is very good-natured!" as if then first she discovered the fact. But Thornwick could never more to Letty feel like a home! Not at peace with herself, she could not be in rhythmic relation with her surroundings.

The next day, the old manner of life began again; but, alas! it was only the old manner, it was not the old life: that was gone for ever, like an old sunset, or an old song, and could not be recalled from the dead. We may have better, but we cannot have the same. God only can have the same. God grant our new may inwrap our

old! Letty laboured more than ever to lay hold of the lessons, to his mind so genial, in hers bringing forth more labour than fruit, which Godfrey set before her, but success seemed farther from her than ever. She was now all the time aware of a weight, an oppression, which seemed to belong to the task, but was in reality her self-dissatisfaction. She was like a poor Hebrew set to make brick without straw, but the Egyptian that had brought her into bondage, was the feebleness of her own will. Now and then would come a break—a glow of beauty, a gleam of truth; for a moment she would forget herself; for a moment a shining pool would flash on the clouded sea of her life; presently her heart would send up a fresh mist, the light would fade and vanish, and the sea lie dusky and sad. Not seldom reproaching herself with having given Tom cause to think unjustly of her guardians, she would try harder than ever to please her aunt; and the small personal services she had been in the way of rendering to Godfrey, were now ministered with the care of a devotee. Not once should he miss a button from a shirt, or find a sock insufficiently darned! But even this conscience of service did not make her happy. Duty itself could not, where faith was wanting, where the heart was not at one with those to whom the hands were servants. She would cry herself to sleep, and rise early to be sad. She resolved at last, and seemed to gain strength and some peace from the resolve, to do all in her power to avoid Tom; and certainly not once did she try to meet him. Not with him, she could resist him.

Thus it went on. Her aunt saw that something was amiss, and watched her, without attempt at concealment, which added greatly to Letty's discomfort. But the only thing her keenness discovered was, that the girl was forwardly eager to please Godfrey; and the conviction began

to grow that she was indulging the impudent presumption of being in love with her peerless cousin. Then maternal indignation misled her into the folly of dropping hints that should put Godfrey on his guard: men were so easily taken in by designing girls! She did not say much; but she said a good deal too much for her own ends, when she caused her fancy to present itself to the mind of Godfrey.

He had not failed, no one could have failed, to observe the dejection that had for some time ruled every feature and expression of the girl's countenance. Again and again he had asked himself whether she might not be fancying him displeased with her; for he knew well that, becoming more and more aware of what he counted his danger, he had kept of late stricter guard than ever over his behaviour; but, watching her now with the misleading light of his mother's lanthorn, nor quite unwilling, I am bound to confess, that the thing might be as she implied, he became by degrees convinced that she was right.

So far as this, perhaps, the man was pardonable—with a mother to cause him to err. But for what followed, punishment was inevitable. He had a true and strong affection for the girl, but it was an affection as from conscious high to low; an affection, that is, not unmixed with patronage—a bad thing—far worse than it can seem to the heart that indulges it. He still recoiled, therefore, from the idea of such a levelling of himself as he counted it would be to show her anything like the love of a lover. All pride is more or less mean, but one pride may be grander than another, and Godfrey was not herein proud in any grand way. Good fellow as he was, he thought much too much of himself; and, unconsciously comparing it with Letty's, altogether overvalued his worth. Stranger than any bedfellow misery ever acquainted a man withal, are the heartfellows he carries about with him. Noble

as in many ways Wardour was, and kind as, to Letty, he thought he always was, he was not generous towards her; he was not Prince Arthur, "the Knight of Magnificence." Something may perhaps be allowed on the score of the early experience because of which he had resolved—pridefully it is true—never again to come under the power of a woman: it was unworthy of any man, he said, to place his peace in a hand which could thenceforth wring his whole being with agony. But had he now brought himself as severely to task as he ought, he would have discovered that he was making no objection to the little girl's loving him, only he would not love her in the same way in return; and where was the honour in that? Doubtless, had he thus examined himself, he would have thought he meant to take care that the child's love for him should not go too far—should not endanger her peace; and that, if the thing should give her trouble, it should be his business to comfort her in it; but descend he would not—would not *yet*—from his pedestal, to meet the silly thing on the level ground of humanity, and the relation of the man and the woman! Something like this, I say, he would have found in his heart, horrid as it reads. That heart's action was not even, was not healthy.

When in London, he had ransacked Holywell Street for dainty editions of so many of his favourite authors as would make quite a little library for Letty; and on his return, had commissioned a cabinet-maker in Trestbridge to put together a small set of bookshelves, after his own design, measured and fitted to receive them exactly: these shelves, now ready, he fastened to her wall one afternoon when she was out of the way, and filled them with the books. He never doubted that, the moment she saw them, she would rush to find him; and, when he had done, retreated therefore, to his study,

there to sit in readiness to receive her and her gratitude with gentle kindness; when he would express the hope that she would make real friends of the spirits whose quintessence he had thus stored to her hand; and would introduce her to what Milton says in his Areopagitica concerning good books. There, for her sake, then, he sat, in mental state, expectant; but sat in vain. When they met at tea, then, in the presence of his mother, with embarrassment and broken utterance, she did thank him.

"Oh, Cousin Godfrey!" she said, and ceased; then, "It is so much more than I deserve, I dare hardly thank you." After another pause, with a shake of her pretty head, as if she would toss aside her hair, or the tears out of her eyes, "I don't know—I seem to have no right to thank you; I ought not to have such a splendid present. Indeed I don't deserve it. You would not give it me if you knew how naughty I am."

These broken sentences were by both mother and son altogether misinterpreted. The mother, now hearing for the first time of Godfrey's present, was filled with jealousy, and began to revolve thoughts of dire disquietude: was the hussy actually beginning to gain her point, and steal from her the heart of her son? Was it in the girl's blood to wrong her? The father of her had wronged her: she would take care his daughter should not! She had taken a viper to her bosom! Who was *she*, to wriggle herself into an old family and property! Had *she* been born to such things! She would teach her who she was! When dependents began to presume, it was time they had a lesson.

Letty could not bear the sight of the books and their shelves; the very beauty of the bindings was a reproach to her. From the misery of this fresh burden, this new

stirring of her sense of hypocrisy, she began to wish herself anywhere out of the house, and away from Thornwick. It was torture to her to think how she had deceived cousin Godfrey at the hut; and throughout the night, across the darkness, she felt, though she could not see, the books gazing at her, like an embodied conscience, from the wall of her chamber. Twenty times that night she started from her sleep, saying, "I will go where they shall never see me;" then rose with the dawn, and set herself to the hardest work she could find.

The next day was Sunday, and they all went to church. Letty felt that Tom was there too, but she never raised her eyes to glance at him.

He had been looking out in vain for a sight of her —now from the oak-tree, now from his bay mare's back, as he haunted the roads about Thornwick, now from the window of the little public-house where the path across the fields joined the main road to Testbridge; but not once had he caught a glimpse of her.

He had seated himself where he could not fail to see her if she were in the Thornwick pew. How ill she looked! His heart swelled with indignation.

"They are cruel to her," he said; "that is plain. Poor girl, they will kill her! She is a pearl in the oyster-maw of Thornwick. This will never do: I *must* see her somehow!"

If at this crisis Letty had but had a real friend to strengthen and advise her, much suffering might have been spared her, for never was there a more teachable girl. She was indeed only too ready to be advised, too ready to accept for true whatever friendship offered itself. None but the friend who will strengthen us to stand, is worthy of the name. Such a friend Mary would have been, but Letty did not yet know what she needed.

The unrest of her conscience made her shrink from one who was sure to side with that conscience, and help it to trouble her. It was sympathy Letty longed for, not strength, and therefore she was afraid of Mary. She came to see her as she had promised, the Sunday after that disastrous visit; but the weather was still uncertain and gusty, and she found both her and Godfrey in the parlour; nor did Letty give her a chance of speaking to her alone. The poor girl had now far more on her mind that needed help, than then when she went in search of it, but she would seek it no more from her! For, the more she thought, the surer she felt that Mary would insist on her making a disclosure of the whole foolish business to Mrs. Wardour, and would admit neither her own fear nor her aunt's harshness as reason sufficient to the contrary. "More than that," thought Letty, "I can't be sure she wouldn't go, in spite of me, and tell her all about it! and what would become of me then? I should be worse off a hundred times than if I had told her myself."

## CHAPTER XI.

### WILLIAM MARSTON.

THE clouds were gathering over Mary too—deep and dark, but of altogether another kind from those that enveloped Letty: no troubles are for one moment to be compared with those that come of the wrongness, even if it be not wickedness, that is our own. Some clouds rise from stagnant bogs and fens; others from the wide, clean, large ocean. But either kind, thank God, will serve the angels to come down by. In the old stories of celestial visitants the clouds do much; and it is oftenest of all down the misty slope of griefs and pains and fears,

that the most powerful joy slides into the hearts of men and women and children. Beautiful are the feet of the men of science on the dust-heaps of the world, but the patient heart will yield a myriad times greater thanks for the clouds that give foothold to the shining angels.

Few people were interested in William Marston. Of those who saw him in the shop, most turned from him to his jolly partner. But a few there were who, some by instinct, some from experience, did look for him behind the counter, and were disappointed if he were absent: most of them had a repugnance to the over-complaisant Turnbull. Yet Marston was the one whom the wise world of Testbridge called the hypocrite, and Turnbull was the plainspoken, agreeable, honest man of the world, pretending to be no better either than himself or than other people. The few friends, however, that Marston had, loved him as not many are loved: they knew him, not as he seemed to the careless eye, but as he was. Never did man do less either to conceal or to manifest himself. He was all taken up with what he loved, and that was neither himself nor his business. These friends knew that when the far-away look was on him, when his face was paler, and he seemed unaware of person or thing about him, he was not indifferent to their presence, or careless of their existence; it was only that his thoughts were out, like heavenly bees, foraging; a word of direct address brought him back in a moment, and his soul would return to them with a smile. He stood as one on the keystone of a bridge, and held communion now with these, now with those: on this side the river and on that, both companies were his own.

He was not a man of much education, in the vulgar use of the word; but he was a good way on in that education, for the sake of which, and for no other with-

out it, we are here in our consciousness—the education which, once begun, will, soon or slow, lead knowledge captive, and teaches nothing that has to be unlearned again, because every flower of it scatters the seed of one better than itself. The main secret of his progress, the secret of all wisdom, was, that with him action was the beginning and end of thought. He was not one of that cloud of false witnesses, who, calling themselves Christians, take no trouble for the end for which Christ was born, namely, their salvation from unrighteousness—a class that may be divided into the insipid and the offensive, both regardless of obedience, the former indifferent to, the latter contentious for doctrine.

It may well seem strange that such a man should have gone into business with such another as John Turnbull; but the latter had been growing more and more common, while Marston had been growing more and more refined. Still from the first it was an unequal yoking of believer with unbeliever—just as certainly, although not with quite such wretched results, as would have been the marriage of Mary Marston and George Turnbull. And it had been a great trial: punishment had not been spared—with best results in patience and purification; for so are our false steps turned back to good by the evil to which they lead us.

Turnbull was ready to take every safe advantage to be gained from his partner's comparative carelessness about money. He drew a larger proportion of the profits than belonged to his share in the capital, justifying himself on the ground that he had a much larger family, did more of the business, and had to keep up the standing of the firm. He made him pay more than was reasonable for the small part of the house yielded from storage to the accommodation of him, his daughter, and

their servant, notwithstanding that, if they had not lived there, some one must have been paid to do so. Far more than this, careless of his partner's rights, and insensible to his interests, he had for some time been risking the whole affair by private speculations. After all, Marston was the safer man of business, even from the worldly point of view. Alone, it is true, he would hardly have made money, but he would have got through, and would have left his daughter the means of getting through also; for he would have left her in possession of her own peace and the confidence of her friends, which will always prove enough for those who confess themselves to be strangers and pilgrims on the earth—those who regard it as a grand staircase they have to climb, not a plain on which to build their houses and plant their vineyards.

As to the peculiar doctrines of the sect to which he had joined himself, right or wrong in themselves, Marston, after having complied with what seemed to him the letter of the law concerning baptism, gave himself no farther trouble. He had for a long time known—for, by the power of the life in him, he had gathered from the scripture the finest of the wheat, where so many of every sect, great church and little church, gather only the husks and chaff—that the only baptism of any avail is the washing of the fresh birth, and the making new by that breath of God, which, breathed into man's nostrils, first made of him a living soul. When a man *knows* this, potentially he knows all things. But, *just therefore*, he did not stand high with his sect any more than with his customers, though—a fact which Marston himself never suspected—the influence of his position had made them choose him for a deacon.

One evening George had had leave to go home early, because of a party at *the villa*, as the Turnbulls always

called their house; and the boy having also for some cause got leave of absence, Mr. Marston was left to shut the shop himself, Mary, who was in some respects the stronger of the two, assisting him. When he had put up the last shutter, he dropped his arms with a weary sigh. Mary, who had been fastening the bolts inside, met him in the doorway.

"You look worn out, father," she said. "Come and lie down, and I will read to you."

"I will, my dear," he answered. "I don't feel quite myself to-night. The seasons tell upon me now. I suppose the stuff of my tabernacle is wearing thin."

Mary cast an anxious look at him, for, though never a strong man, he seldom complained. But she said nothing, and hoping a good cup of tea would restore him, led the way through the dark shop to the door communicating with the house. Often as she had passed through it thus, the picture of it as she saw it that night was the only one almost that returned to her afterwards: a few vague streaks of light, from the cracks of the shutters, fed the rich warm gloom of the place; one of them fell upon a piece of orange-coloured cotton stuff, which blazed in the dark.

Arrived at their little sitting-room at the top of the stair, she hastened to shake up the pillows and make the sofa comfortable for him. He lay down, and she covered him with a rug; then ran to her room for a book, and read to him while Beenie was getting the tea. She chose a poem with which Mr. Wardour had made her acquainted almost the last time she was at Thornwick—that was several weeks ago now, for plainly Letty was not so glad to see her as she used to be; it was Milton's little ode *On Time*, written for inscription on a clock—one of the grandest of small poems. Her father

knew next to nothing of literature; having pondered his New Testament, however, for thirty years, he was capable of understanding Milton's best—to the child-like mind the best is always simplest and easiest—not unfrequently the *only* kind it can lay hold of. When she ended, he made her read it again, and then again; not until she had read it six times did he seem content. And every time she read it, Mary found herself understanding it better. It was gradually growing very precious.

Her father had made no remark; but when she lifted her eyes from the sixth reading, she saw that his face shone, and as the last words left her lips, he took up the line like a refrain, and repeated it after her:—

"Triumphing over death, and chance, and thee, O Time!

"That will do now, Mary, I thank you," he said. "I have got a good hold of it, I think, and shall be able to comfort myself with it when I wake in the night. The man must have been very like the apostle Paul."

He said no more. The tea was brought, and he drank a cup of it, but could not eat; and as he could not, neither could Mary.

"I want a long sleep," he said; and the words went to his child's heart—she dared not question herself why. When the tea-things were removed, he called her.

"Mary," he said, "come here. I want to speak to you."

She kneeled beside him.

"Mary," he said again, taking her little hand in his two long, bony ones, "I love you, my child, to that degree I cannot say; and I want you, I do want you to be a Christian."

"So do I, father dear," answered Mary simply, the tears rushing into her eyes at the thought that perhaps she was not one; "I want me to be a Christian."

"Yes, my love," he went on; "but it is not that I do not think you a Christian; it is that I want you to be a downright real Christian, not one that is but trying to feel as a Christian ought to feel. I have lost so much precious time in that way!"

"Tell me; tell me," cried Mary, clasping her other hand over his. "What would you have me do?"

"I will tell you. I am just trying how," he responded. "A Christian is just one that does what the Lord Jesus tells him. Neither more nor less than that makes a Christian. It is not even understanding the Lord Jesus that makes one a Christian. That makes one dear to the Father; but it is being a Christian, that is, doing what he tells us, that makes us understand him. Peter says the holy spirit is given to them that obey him: what else is that but just actually, really, doing what he says —just as if I was to tell you to go and fetch me my bible, and you would get up and go?—Did you ever do anything, my child, just because Jesus told you to do it?"

Mary did not answer immediately. She thought a while. Then she spoke.

"Yes, father," she said, "I think so. Two nights ago, George was very rude to me—I don't mean anything bad, but you know he is very rough."

"I know it, my child. And you must not think I don't care because I think it better not to interfere. I am with you all the time."

"Thank you, father; I know it.—Well, when I was going to bed, I was angry with him still, so it was no wonder I found I could not say my prayers. Then I remembered how Jesus said we must forgive or we should not be forgiven. So I forgave him with all my heart, and kindly too, and then I found I could pray."

The father stretched out his arms and drew her to

his bosom, murmuring, "My child! my Christ's-child!" After a little he began to talk again.

"It is a miserable thing to hear those who desire to believe themselves Christians, talking and talking about this question and that, the discussion of which is all for strife and nowise for unity—not a thought amongst them of the one command of Christ, to love one another. I fear some are hardly content with not hating those who differ from them."

"I am sure, father, I try—and I think I do love everybody that loves Him," said Mary.

"Well, that is much—not enough though, my child. We must be like Jesus, and you know that it was while we were yet sinners that Christ died for us; therefore we must love all men, whether they are Christians or not."

"Tell me then what you want me to do, father dear. I will do whatever you tell me."

"I want you to be just like that to the Lord Christ, Mary. I want you to look out for his will, and find it, and do it. I want you not only to do it, though that is the main thing, when you think of it, but to look for it, that you may do it. I need not say to you that this is not a thing to be *talked* about much, for you don't do that. You may think me very silent, my love; but I do not talk always when I am inclined, for the fear I might let my feeling out that way, instead of doing something he wants of me with it. And how repulsive and full of offence those generally are who talk most! Our strength ought to go into conduct, not into talk—least of all into talk about what they call the doctrines of the gospel. The man who does what God tells him, sits at his Father's feet, and looks up in his Father's face; and men had better leave him alone, for he cannot greatly mistake his Father, and certainly will not displease him. Look

for the lovely will, my child, that you may be its servant, its priest, its sister, its queen, its slave—as Paul calls himself. How that man did glory in his Master!"

"I will try, father," returned Mary, with a burst of tears. "I do want to be good. I do want to be one of his slaves, if I may."

"*May!* my child? You are bound to be. You have no choice but choose it. It is what we are made for—freedom, the divine nature, God's life, a grand, pure, open-eyed existence! It is what Christ died for. You must not talk about *may;* it is all *must.*"

Mary had never heard her father talk like this, and, notwithstanding the endless interest of his words, it frightened her. An instinctive uneasiness crept up and laid hold of her. The unsealing hand of Death was opening the mouth of a dumb prophet.

A pause followed, and he spoke again.

"I will tell you one thing now that Jesus says: he is unchangeable; what he says once he says always; and I mention it now, because it may not be long before you are specially called to mind it. It is this: '*Let not your heart be troubled.*'"

"But he said that on one particular occasion, and to his disciples—did he not?" said Mary, willing, in her dread, to give the conversation a turn.

"Ah! Mary!" said her father with a smile, "*will* you let the questioning spirit deafen you to the teaching one? Ask yourself, the first time you are alone, what the disciples were not to be troubled about, and why they were not to be troubled about it.—I am tired, and should like to go to bed."

He rose, and stood for a moment in front of the fire, winding his old double-cased silver watch. Mary took from her side the little gold one he had given her, and,

as was her custom, handed it to him to wind for her. The next moment he had dropped it on the fender.

"Ah, my child!" he cried, and, stooping, gathered up a dying thing, whose watchfulness was all over. The glass was broken; the case was open; it lay in his hand a mangled creature. Mary heard the rush of its departing life, as the wheels went whirring, and the hands circled rapidly.

They stopped motionless. She looked up in her father's face with a smile. He was looking concerned.

"I am very sorry, Mary," he said; "but if it is past repair, I will get you another.—You don't seem to mind it much!" he added, and smiled himself.

"Why should I, father dear?" she replied. "When one's father breaks one's watch, what is there to say but 'I am very glad it was you did it'? I shall like the little thing the better for it."

He kissed her on the forehead.

"My child, say that to your Father in heaven, when he breaks something for you. He will do it from love, not from blundering. I don't often preach to you, my child—do I? but somehow it comes to me to-night."

"I will remember, father," said Mary; and she did remember.

She went with him to his bed-room, and saw that everything was right for him. When she went again, before going to her own, he felt more comfortable, he said, and expected to have a good night. Relieved, she left him; but her heart would be heavy. A shapeless sadness seemed pressing it down: it was being got ready for what it had to bear.

When she went to his room in the middle of the night, she found him slumbering peacefully, and went back to her own and slept better. When she went again in

the morning, he lay white, motionless, and without a breath.

It was not in Mary's nature to give sudden vent to her feelings. For a time she was stunned. As if her life had rushed to overtake her departing parent, and beg a last embrace, she stood gazing motionless. The sorrow was too huge for entrance. The thing could not be! Not until she stooped and kissed the pale face, did the stone in her bosom break, and yield a torrent of grief. But, although she had left her father in that very spot the night before, already she not only knew but felt that was not he which lay where she had left him. He was gone, and she was alone. She tried to pray, but her heart seemed to lie dead in her bosom, and no prayer would rise from it. It was the time of all times when, if ever, prayer must be the one reasonable thing—and pray she could not. In her dull stupor she did not hear Beenie's knock. The old woman entered, and found her on her knees, with her forehead on one of the dead hands, while the white face of her master lay looking up to heaven, as if praying for the living not yet privileged to die. Then first was the peace of death broken. Beenie gave a loud cry, and turned and ran, as if to warn the neighbours that Death was loose in the town. Thereupon, as if Death were a wild beast yet lurking in it, the house was filled with noise and tumult; the sanctuary of the dead was invaded by unhallowed presence; and the poor girl, hearing behind her voices she did not love, raised herself from her knees, and, without lifting her eyes, crept from the room and away to her own.

"Follow her, George," said his father, in a loud, eager whisper. "You've got to comfort her now. That's your business, George. There's your chance!"

The last words he called from the bottom of the stair, as George sped up after her.

"Mary! Mary, dear!" he called as he ran.

But Mary had the instinct—it was hardly more—to quicken her pace, and lock the door of her room the moment she entered. As she turned from it, her eye fell upon her watch—where it lay, silent and disfigured, on her dressing-table; and with the sight, the last words of her father came back to her. She fell again on her knees with a fresh burst of weeping, and while the foolish youth was knocking unheard at her door, cried, with a strange mixture of agony and comfort, "Oh my Father in heaven, give me back William Marston." Never in his life had she thought of her father by his name; but death, while it made him dearer than ever, set him away from her so, that she began to see him in his larger individuality, as a man before the God of men, a son before the Father of many sons: Death turns a man's sons and daughters into his brothers and sisters. And while she kneeled, and, with exhausted heart, let her brain go on working of itself, as it seemed, came a dreamy vision of the Saviour with his disciples about him, reasoning with them that they should not give way to grief. "Let not your heart be troubled," he seemed to be saying, "although I die, and go out of your sight. It is all well. Take my word for it."

She rose, wiped her eyes, looked up, said, "I will try, Lord," and going down, called Beenie, and sent her to ask Mr. Turnbull to speak with her. She knew her father's ideas, and must do her endeavour to have the funeral as simple as possible. It was a relief to have something, anything, to do in his name.

Mr. Turnbull came, and the coarse man was kind. It went not a little against the grain with him, to order

what he called a pauper's funeral for the junior partner in the firm; but, more desirous than ever to conciliate Mary, he promised all that she wished.

"Marston was but a poor-spirited fellow," he said to his wife when he told her; "the thing is a disgrace to the shop, but it's fit enough for him.—It will be so much money saved," he added in self-consolation, while his wife turned up her nose, as she always did at any mention of the shop.

Mary returned to her father's room, now silent again with the air of that which is not. She took from the table the old silver watch. It went on measuring the time by a scale now useless to its owner. She placed it lovingly in her bosom, and sat down by the bedside. Already, through love, sorrow, and obedience, she began to find herself drawing nearer to him than she had ever been before; already she was able to recall his last words, and strengthen her resolve to keep them. And sitting thus, holding vague companionship with the merely mortal, the presence of that which was not her father, which was like him only to remind her that it was not he, and which must so soon cease to resemble him, there sprang, as in the very foot-print of Death, yet another flower of rarest comfort—a strong feeling, namely, of the briefness of time, and the certainty of the messenger's return to fetch herself. Her soul did not sink into peace, but a strange peace awoke in her spirit. She heard the spring of the great clock that measures the years, rushing rapidly down with a feverous whir; and saw the hands that measure the weeks and months, careering around its face; while Death, like one of the white-robed angels in the tomb of the Lord, sat watching, with patient smile, for the hour when he should be wanted to go for her. Thus mingled her broken watch, her father's death,

and Jean Paul's dream; and the fancy might well comfort her.

I will not linger much more over the crumbling time. It is good for those who are in it, specially good for those who come out of it chastened and resolved; but I doubt if any prolonged contemplation of death is desirable for those whose business it now is to live, and whose fate it is ere long to die. It is a closing of God's hand upon us to squeeze some of the bad blood out of us, and when it relaxes, we must live the more diligently—not to get ready for death, but to get more life. I will relate only one thing yet, belonging to this twilight time.

## CHAPTER XII.

### MARY'S DREAM.

That night, and every night until the dust was laid to the dust, Mary slept well; and through the days she had great composure; but, when the funeral was over, came a collapse and a change. The moment it became necessary to look on the world as unchanged, and resume former relations with it, then first a fuller sense of her lonely desolation declared itself. When she said good night to Beenie, and went to her chamber, over that where the loved parent and friend would fall asleep no more, she felt as if she went walking along to her tomb.

That night was the first herald of the coming winter, and blew a cold blast from his horn. All day the wind had been out. Wildly in the churchyard it had pulled at the long grass, as if it would tear it from its roots in the graves; it had struck vague sounds, as from a hollow world, out of the great bell overhead in the huge tower;

and it had beat loud and fierce against the corner-buttresses which went stretching up out of the earth, like arms to hold steady and fast the lighthouse of the dead above the sea which held them drowned below; despairingly had the grey clouds drifted over the sky; and, like white clouds pinioned below, and shadows that could not escape, the surplice of the ministering priest and the garments of the mourners had flapped and fluttered as in captive terror; the only still things were the coffin and the church—and the soul which had risen above the region of storms in the might of him who abolished death. At the time Mary had noted nothing of these things; now she saw them all, as for the first time, in minute detail, while slowly she went up the stair and through the narrowed ways, and heard the same wind that raved alike about the new grave and the old house, into which latter, for all the bales banked against the walls, it found many a chink of entrance. The smell of the linen, of the blue cloth, and of the brown paper—things no longer to be handled by those tender, faithful hands—was dismal and strange, and haunted her like things that intruded, things which she had done with, and which yet would not go away. Everything had gone dead, as it seemed, had exhaled the soul of it, and retained but the odour of its mortality. If for a moment a thing looked the same as before, she wondered vaguely, unconsciously, how it could be. The passages through the merchandize, left only wide enough for one, seemed like those she had read of in Egyptian tombs and pyramids: a sarcophagus ought to be waiting in her chamber. When she opened the door of it, the bright fire which Beenie undesired had kindled there, startled her: the room looked unnatural, *uncanny*, because it was cheerful. She stood for a moment on the hearth, and in sad dreamy

mood listened to the howling swoops of the wind, making the house quiver and shake. Now and then would come a greater gust, and rattle the window as if in fierce anger at its exclusion, then go shrieking and wailing through the dark heaven. Mechanically she took her New Testament, and seating herself in a low chair by the fire, tried to read; but she could not fix her thoughts, or get the meaning of a sentence: when she had read it, there it lay, looking at her just the same, like an unanswered riddle.

The region of the senses is the unbelieving part of the human soul; and out of that now began to rise fumes of doubt and question into Mary's heart and brain. Death was a fact. The loss, the evanishment, the ceasing, were incontrovertible—the only incontrovertible things: she was sure of them: could she be sure of anything else? How could she? She had not seen Christ rise; she had never looked upon one of the dead; never heard a voice from the other bank; had received no certain testimony. These were not her thoughts; she was too weary to think; they were but the thoughts that steamed up in her, and went floating about before her; she looked on them calmly, coldly, as they came, and passed, or remained—saw them with indifference—there they were, and she could not help it—weariedly, believing none of them, unable to cope with and dispel them, hardly affected by their presence, save with a sense of dreariness and loneliness and wretched company. At last she fell asleep, and in a moment was dreaming diligently. This was her dream, as nearly as she could recall it, when she came to herself after waking from it with a cry.

She was one of a large company at a house where she had never been before—a beautiful house with a large garden behind. It was a summer night, and the

guests were wandering in and out at will, and through house and garden, amid lovely things of all colours and odours. The moon was shining, and the roses were in pale bloom. But she knew nobody, and wandered alone in the garden, oppressed with something she did not understand. Every now and then she came on a little group, or met a party of the guests, as she walked, but none spoke to her, or seemed to see her, and she spoke to none.

She found herself at length in an avenue of dark trees, the end of which was far off. Thither she went walking, the only living thing, crossing strange shadows from the moon. At the end of it, she was in a place of tombs. Terror and a dismay indescribable seized her; she turned and fled back to the company of her kind. But for a long time she sought the house in vain; she could not reach it; the avenue seemed interminable to her feet returning. At last she was again upon the lawn, but neither man nor woman was there; and in the house only a light here and there was burning. Every guest was gone. She entered, and the servants, soft-footed and silent, were busy carrying away the vessels of hospitality, and restoring order, as if already they prepared for another company on the morrow. No one heeded her. She was out of place, and much unwelcome. She hastened to the door of entrance, for every moment there was a misery. She reached the hall. A strange, shadowy porter opened to her, and she stepped out into a wide street.

That too was silent. No carriage rolled along the centre, no footfarer walked on the side. Not a light shone from window or door, save what they gave back of the yellow light of the moon. She was lost—lost utterly, with an eternal loss. She knew nothing of the

place, had nowhere to go, nowhere she wanted to go, had not a thought to tell her what question to ask, if she met a living soul. But living soul there could be none to meet. She had nor home, nor direction, nor desire; she knew of nothing that she had lost, nor of anything she wished to gain; she had nothing left but the sense that she was empty, that she needed some goal, and had none. She sat down upon a stone between the wide street and the wide pavement, and saw the moon shining grey upon the stone houses. It was all deadness.

Presently, from somewhere in the moon-light, appeared, walking up to her, where she sat in eternal listlessness, the one only brother she had ever had. She had lost him years and years before, and now she saw him; he was there, and she knew him. But not a throb went through her heart. He came to her side, and she gave him no greeting. "Why should I heed him?" she said to herself. "He is dead. I am only in a dream. This is not he; it is but his pitiful phantom that comes wandering hither—a ghost without a heart, made out of the moonlight. It is nothing. I am nothing. I am lost. Everything is an empty dream of loss. I know it, and there is no waking. If there were, surely the sight of him would give me some shimmer of delight. The old time was but a thicker dream, and this is truer because more shadowy." And, the form still standing by her, she felt it was ages away; she was divided from it by a gulf of very nothingness. Her only life was, that she was lost. Her whole consciousness was merest, all but abstract, loss.

Then came the form of her mother, and bent over that of her brother from behind. "Another ghost of a ghost! another shadow of a phantom!" she said to herself. "She is nothing to me. If I speak to her, she is

not there. Shall I pour out my soul into the ear of a mist, a fume from my own brain? Oh, cold creatures, ye are not what ye seem, and I will none of you!"

With that, came her father, and stood beside the others, gazing upon her with still, cold eyes, expressing only a pale quiet. She bowed her face on her hands, and would not regard him. Even if he were alive, her heart was past being moved. It was settled into stone. The universe was sunk in one of the dreams that haunt the sleep of death; and if these were ghosts at all, they were ghosts walking in their sleep.

But the dead, one of them seized one of her hands, and another the other. They raised her to her feet, and led her along, and her brother walked before. Thus was she borne away captive of her dead, neither willing nor unwilling, of life and death equally careless. Through the moonlight they led her from the city, and over fields, and through valleys, and across rivers and seas—a long journey; nor did she grow weary, for there was not life enough in her to be made weary. The dead never spoke to her, and she never spoke to them. Sometimes it seemed as if they spoke to each other, but if it were so, it concerned some shadowy matter, no more to her than the talk of grasshoppers in the field, or of beetles that weave their much-involved dances on the face of the pool. Their voices were even too thin and remote to rouse her to listen.

They came at length to a great mountain, and as they were going up the mountain, light began to grow, as if the sun were beginning to rise. But she cared as little for the sun that was to light the day, as for the moon that had lighted the night, and closed her eyes, that she might cover her soul with her eyelids.

Of a sudden a great splendour burst upon her, and

through her eyelids she was struck blind—blind with light and not with darkness, for all was radiance about her. She was like a fish in a sea of light. But she neither loved the light, nor mourned the shadow.

Then were her ears invaded with a confused murmur, as of the mingling of all sweet sounds of the earth—of wind and water, of bird and voice of string and metal—all afar and indistinct. Next arose about her a whispering, as of winged insects, talking with human voices; but she listened to nothing, and heard nothing of what was said: it was all a tiresome dream, out of which whether she waked or died it mattered not.

Suddenly she was taken between two hands, and lifted, and seated upon knees like a child, and she felt that some one was looking at her. Then came a voice, one she had never heard before, yet with which she was as familiar as with the sound of the blowing wind. And the voice said, "Poor child! something has closed the valve between her heart and mine." With that came a pang of intense pain. But it was her own cry of speechless delight that woke her from her dream.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE HUMAN SACRIFICE.

The same wind that rushed about the funeral of William Marston in the old churchyard of Testbridge, howled in the roofless hall and ruined tower of Durnmelling, and dashed against the plate-glass windows of the dining-room, where the three ladies sat at lunch. Immediately it was over, Lady Malice rose, saying,—

"Hesper, I want a word with you. Come to my room."

Hesper obeyed, with calmness, but without a doubt that evil awaited her there. To that room she had never been summoned for anything she could call good. And indeed she knew well enough what evil it was that to-day played the Minotaur. When they reached the *boudoir*, rightly so called, for it was more in use for *sulking* than for anything else, Lady Margaret, with back as straight as the door she had just closed, led the way to the fire, and seating herself, motioned Hesper to a chair. Hesper again obeyed, looking as unconcerned as if she cared for nothing in this world or in any other. Would we were all as strong to suppress hate and fear and anxiety, as some ladies are to suppress all show of them! Such a woman looks to me like an automaton, in which a human soul, somewhere concealed, tries to play a good game of life, and makes a sad mess of it.

"Well, Hesper, what do you think?" said her mother, with a dull attempt at gaiety, which could nowise impose upon the experience of her daughter.

"I think nothing, mamma," drawled Hesper.

"Mr. Redmain has come to the point at last, my dear child."

"What point, mamma?"

"He had a private interview with your father this morning."

"Indeed!"

"Foolish girl! you think to tease me by pretending indifference!"

"How can a fact be pretended, mamma? Why should I care what passes in the study? I was never welcome there. But if you wish, I will pretend.—What important matter was settled in the study this morning?"

"Hesper, you provoke me with your affectation!"

Hesper's eyes began to flash. Otherwise she was

still—silent—not a feature moved. The eyes are more untamable than the tongue. When the wild beast cannot get out at the door, nothing can keep him from the windows. The eyes flash when the will is yet lord even of the lines of the mouth. Not a nerve of Hesper's quivered. Though a mere child in the knowledge that concerned her own being, even the knowledge of what is commonly called the heart, she was yet a mistress of the art of self-defence, socially applied, and she would not now put herself at the disadvantage of taking anything for granted, or accept the clearest hint for a plain statement. She not merely continued silent, but looked so utterly void of interest, or desire to speak, that her mother, recognizing her own child, and quailing before the evil spirit she had herself sent on to the generations to come, yielded and spoke out.

"Mr. Redmain has proposed for your hand, Hesper," she said, in a tone as indifferent in her turn as if she were mentioning the appointment of a new clergyman to the family-living.

For one moment, and one only, the repose of Hesper's faultless upper lip gave way; one writhing movement of scorn passed along its curves, and left them for a moment straightened out—to return presently to a grander bend than before. In a tone that emulated, and more than equalled, the indifference of her mother's, she answered,—

"And papa?"

"Has referred him to you, of course," replied Lady Margaret.

"Meaning it?"

"What else? Why not? Is he not a *bon parti?*"

"Then papa did not mean it?"

"I do not understand you," elaborated the mother,

with a mingled yawn, which she was far from attempting to suppress, seeing she simulated it.

"If Mr. Redmain is such a good match in papa's eyes," explained Hesper, "why does papa refer him to me?"

"That you may accept him, of course."

"How much has the man promised to pay for me?"

"*Hesper!*"

"I beg your pardon, mamma. I thought you approved of calling things by their right names!"

"No girl can do better than follow her mother's example," said Lady Margaret, with vague sequence. "If *you* do, Hesper, you will accept Mr. Redmain."

Hesper fixed her eyes on her mother, but hers were too cold and clear to quail before them, let them flash and burn as they pleased.

"As you did papa?" said Hesper.

"As I did Mr. Mortimer."

"That explains a good deal, mamma."

"We are *your* parents, anyhow, Hesper."

"I suppose so. I don't know which to be sorrier for —you or me. Tell me, mamma: would *you* marry Mr. Redmain?"

"That is a foolish question, and ought not to be put. It is one which, as a married woman, I could not consider without impropriety. Knowing the duty of a daughter, I did not put the question to *you*. You are yourself the offspring of duty."

"If you were in my place, mamma," re-attempted Hesper, but her mother did not allow her to proceed.

"In any place, in every place, I should do my duty," she said.

It was not only born in Lady Malice's blood, but from earliest years had been impressed on her brain,

that her first duty was to her family, and mainly consisted in getting well out of its way—in going peaceably through the fire to Moloch, that the rest might have good places in the Temple of Mammon. In her turn, she had trained her children to the bewildering conviction that it was duty to do a certain wrong, if it should be required. That wrong thing was now required of Hesper—a thing she scorned, hated, shuddered at; she must follow the rest; her turn to be sacrificed was come; she must henceforth be a living lie. She could recompense herself as the daughters who have sinned by yielding generally do when they are mothers, with the sin of compelling, and thus make the trespass round and full. There is in no language yet the word invented to fit the vileness of such mothers; but as time flows and speech grows, it may be found, and when it is found, it will have action retrospective. It is a frightful thing when ignorance of evil, so much to be desired where it can contribute to safety, is employed to smooth the way to the unholiest doom, in which love itself must ruthlessly perish, and those who on the plea of virtue were kept ignorant, be perfected in the image of the mothers who gave them over to destruction. Some, doubtless, of the innocents thus immolated, pass even through hideous fires of marital foulness to come out the purer and the sweeter; but whither must the stone about the neck of those that cause the little ones to offend, sink those mothers? What company shall in the end be too low, too foul for them? Like to like it must always be.

Hesper was not so ignorant as some girls; she had for some time had one at her side capable of casting not a little light of the kind that is darkness.

"*Duty*, mamma!" she cried, her eyes flaming, and her cheek flushed with the shame of the thing that was

but as yet the merest object in her thought; "can a woman be born for such things? How *could* I—mamma, how could any woman, with an atom of self-respect, consent to occupy the same—*room* with Mr. Redmain?"

"Hesper! I am shocked. *Where* did you learn to speak, not to say *think* of such things? Have I taken such pains—good God! you strike me dumb! Have I watched my child like a very—angel, as anxious to keep her mind pure as her body fair, and is *this* the result?"

Upon what Lady Margaret founded her claim to a result more satisfactory to her maternal designs, it were hard to say. For one thing she had known nothing of what went on in her nursery, positively nothing of the real character of the women to whom she gave the charge of it; and although, I daresay, for worldly women, Hesper's school-mistresses were quite respectable—what did her mother, what could she know of the governesses, or of the flock of sheep—all presumably, but how certainly *all* white?—into which she had sent her?

"Is *this* the result?" said Lady Margaret.

"Was it your object, then, to keep me innocent, only that I might have the necessary lessons in wickedness first from my husband?" said Hesper, with a rudeness for which if an apology be necessary, I leave my reader to find it.

"Hesper, you are vulgar!" said Lady Margaret, with cold indignation, and an expression of unfeigned disgust. She was indeed genuinely shocked. That a young lady of Hesper's birth and position should talk like this, actually objecting to a man as her husband because she recoiled from his wickedness, of which she was not to be supposed to know, or to be capable of understanding, anything, was a thing unheard of in her world—a thing unmaidenly in the extreme! What innocent girl would

or could or dared allude to such matters? She had no right to know an atom about them!

"You are a married woman, mamma," returned Hesper, "and therefore must know a great many things I neither know nor wish to know. For anything I know, you may be ever so much a better woman than I, for having learned not to mind things that are a horror to me. But there was a time when you shrunk from them as I do now. I appeal to you as a woman: for God's sake save me from marrying that wretch."

She spoke in a tone inconsistently calm.

"Girl! is it possible you dare to call the man whom your father and I have chosen for your husband, a wretch!"

"Is he not a wretch, mamma?"

"If he were, how should I know it? What has any lady got to do with a man's secrets?"

"Not if he wants to marry her daughter?"

"Certainly not. If he should not be altogether what he ought to be—and which of us is?—then you will have the honour of reclaiming him. But men settle down when they marry."

"And what comes of their wives?"

"What comes of women. You have your mother before you, Hesper."

"Oh, mother!" cried Hesper, now at length losing the horrible affectation of calm which she had been taught to regard as *de rigueur*, "is it possible that you, so beautiful, so dignified, would send me on to meet things you dare not tell me—knowing they would turn me sick or mad? How dares a man like that even desire in his heart to touch an innocent girl?"

"Because he is tired of the other sort," said Lady Malice, half unconsciously, to herself. What she said to

her daughter was ten times worse: the one was merely a fact concerning Redmain; the other revealed a horrible truth concerning herself. "He will settle three thousand a year on you, Hesper," she said with a sigh; "and you will find yourself mistress."

"I don't doubt it," answered Hesper, in bitter scorn. "Such a man is incapable of making any woman a wife."

Hesper meant an awful spiritual fact, of which, with all her ignorance of human nature, she had yet got a glimpse, in her tortured reflections of late; but her mother's familiarity with evil misinterpreted her innocence, and caused herself utter dismay. What right had a girl to think at all for herself in such matters! These were things that must be done, not thought of!

> These things must not be thought
> After these ways; so, they will drive us mad.

Yes, these things are hard to think about—harder yet to write about! The very persons who would send the white soul into arms whose mere touch is a dishonour, will be the first to cry out with indignation against that writer as shameless, who but utters the truth concerning the things they mean and do: they fear lest their innocent daughters, into whose hands his books might chance, by ill-luck, to fall, should learn that it is *their* business to keep themselves pure.—Ah, sweet mothers! do not be afraid. You have brought them up so carefully, that they suspect you no more than they do the well-bred gentlemen you would have them marry. And have they not your blood in them? That will go far. Never heed the foolish puritan. Your mothers succeeded with you: you will succeed with your daughters.

But it is a shame to speak of those things that are done of you in secret, and I will forbear. Thank God,

the day will come—it may be thousands of years away—when there shall be no such things for a man to think of, any more than for a girl to shudder at. There is a purification in progress, and the kingdom of heaven *will* come, thanks to the man who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. You have heard a little, probably only a little, about him at church sometimes. But when that day comes, what part will you have had in causing evil to cease from the earth?

There had been a time in the mother's life, when she herself regarded her approaching marriage with a man she did not love, as a horror to which her natural maidenliness—a thing she could not help—had to be compelled and subjected: of the true maidenliness—that before which the angels make obeisance, and the lion cowers—she never had had any; for that must be gained by the pure will, yielding itself to the power of the highest. Hence she had not merely got used to the horror, but in a measure satisfied with it; never suspecting, because never caring enough, that she had at the same time, and that not very gradually, been assimilating to the horror; had lost much of what purity she had once had, and become herself unclean, body and mind, in the contact with uncleanness. One thing she did know, and that swallowed up all the rest—that her husband's affairs were so involved as to threaten absolute poverty; and what woman of the world would not count damnation better than that?—while Mr. Redmain was rolling in money. Had she known everything bad of her daughter's suitor, short of legal crime, for her this would have covered it all.

In Hesper's useless explosion the mother did not fail to recognize the presence of Sepia, without whose knowledge of the bad side of the world, Hesper, she believed,

could not have been awake to so much. But she was afraid of Sepia. Besides, the thing was so far done; and she did not think she would work to thwart the marriage. On that point she would speak to her.

But it was a doubtful service that Sepia had rendered her cousin—to rouse her indignation and not her strength; to wake horror without hinting at remedy; to give knowledge of impending doom, without poorest suggestion of hope, or vaguest shadow of possible escape. It is one thing to see things as they are; to be consumed with indignation at the wrong; to shiver with aversion to the abominable; and quite another to rouse the will to confront the devil, and resist him until he flee. For this the whole education of Hesper had tended to unfit her. What she had been taught—and that in a world rendered possible only by the self-denial of a God—was to drift with the stream, denying herself only that divine strength of honest love, which would soonest help her to breast it.

For the earth, it is a blessed thing that those who arrogate to themselves the holy name of society, and to whom so large a portion of the foolish world willingly yields it, are in reality so few and so ephemeral. Mere human froth are they, worked up by the churning of the world-sea—rainbow-tinted froth, lovely thinned water, weaker than the unstable itself out of which it is blown. Great as their ordinance seems, it is evanescent as arbitrary: the arbitrary is but the slavish puffed up—and is gone with the hour. The life of the people is below; it ferments, and the scum is for ever being skimmed off, and cast—God knows where. All is scum where will is not. They leave behind them influences indeed, but few that keep their vitality in shapes of art or literature. There they go—little sparrows of the human world, chattering eagerly, darting on every crumb and seed of

supposed advantage! while from behind the great dustman's cart, the huge tiger-cat of an eternal law is creeping upon them. Is it a spirit of insult that leads me to such a comparison? Where human beings do not, will not *will*, let them be ladies gracious as the graces, the comparison is to the disadvantage of the sparrows. Not time, but experience will show, that, although indeed a simile, this is no hyperbole.

"I will leave your father to deal with you, Hesper," said her mother, and rose.

Up to this point, Mortimer children had often resisted their mother; beyond this point, never more than once.

"No, please, mamma! returned Hesper, in a tone of expostulation. "I have spoken my mind, but that is no treason. As my father has referred Mr. Redmain to me, I would rather deal with him."

Lady Malice was herself afraid of her husband. There is many a woman, otherwise courageous enough, who will rather endure the worst and most degrading, than encounter articulate insult. The mere lack of conscience gives the scoundrel advantage incalculable over the honest man; the lack of refinement gives a similar advantage to the cad over the gentleman; the combination of the two lacks, elevates the husband and father into an autocrat. Hesper was not one her world would have counted weak; she had physical courage enough; she rode well, and without fear; she sat calm in the dentist's chair; she would have fought with knife and pistol against violence to the death; and yet, rather than encounter the brutality of an evil-begotten race concentrated in her father, she would yield herself to a defilement eternally more defiling than that she would both kill and die to escape.

"Give me a few hours first, mamma," she begged. "Don't let him come to me just yet. For all your hardness, you feel a little for me—don't you?"

"Duty is always hard, my child," said Lady Margaret. She entirely believed it, and looked on herself as a martyr, a pattern of self-devotion and womanly virtue. But, had she been certain of escaping discovery, she would have slipped the koh-i-noor into her belt-pouch, notwithstanding. Never once in her life had she done or abstained from doing a thing *because* that thing was right or was wrong. Such a person, be she as old and as hard as the hills, is mere putty in the fingers of Beelzebub.

Hesper rose, and went to her own room. There, for a long hour, she sat—with the skin of her fair face drawn tight over muscles rigid as marble—sat without moving, almost without thinking—in a mere hell of disgusted anticipation. She neither stormed nor wept; her life went smouldering on; she nerved herself to a brave endurance, instead of a far braver resistance.

I fancy Hesper would have been a little shocked if one had called her an atheist. She went to church most Sundays—when in the country; for in the opinion of Lady Margaret, it was not decorous, *there* to omit the ceremony: where you have influence you ought to set a good example—of hypocrisy, namely! But if any one had suggested to Hesper a certain old-fashioned use of her chamber-door, she would have inwardly laughed at the absurdity. But, then, you see, her chamber was no closet, but a large and stately room; and besides, how, alas! *could* the child of Roger and Lady M. Alice Mortimer know that in the silence was hearing—that in the vacancy was a power waiting to be sought? Hesper was not much alone, and here was a chance it was a pity

she should lose; but when she came to herself with a sigh, it was not to pray, and when she rose, it was to ring the bell.

A good many minutes passed before it was answered. She paced the room—swiftly; she could sit, but she could not walk slowly. With her hands to her head, she went sweeping up and down. Her maid's knock arrested her before her toilet-table, with her back to the door. In a voice of perfect composure, she desired the woman to ask Miss Yolland to come to her.

Entering with a slight stoop from the waist, Sepia, with a long, rapid, yet altogether graceful step, bore down upon Hesper like a fast-sailing cutter over broad waves, relaxing her speed as she approached her.

"Here I am, Hesper!" she said.

"Sepia," said Hesper, "I am sold."

Miss Yolland gave a little laugh, showing about the half of her splendid teeth—a laugh to which Hesper was accustomed, but the meaning of which she did not understand—nor would, without learning a good deal that were better left unlearned.

"To Mr. Redmain, of course!" she said.

Hesper nodded.

"When are you going to be—"—she was about to say "cut up," but there was a something occasionally visible in Hesper that now and then checked one of her less graceful coarsenesses. "When is the purchase to be completed?" she asked instead.

"Good Heavens, Sepia! don't be so heartless!" cried Hesper. "Things are not quite so bad as that! I am not yet in the hell of knowing that. The day is not fixed for the great red dragon to make a meal of me."

"I see you were not asleep in church, as I thought, all the time of the sermon, last Sunday," said Sepia.

"I did my best, but I could not sleep: every time little Mowbray mentioned the beast, I thought of Mr. Redmain; and it made me too miserable to sleep."

"Poor Hesper!—Well! let us hope that, like the beast in the fairy-tale, he will turn out a man after all."

"My heart will break," cried Hesper, throwing herself into a chair. "Pity me, Sepia; *you* love me a little."

A slight shadow darkened yet more Sepia's shadowy brow.

"Hesper," she said gravely, "you never told me there was anything of that sort! Who is it?"

"Mr. Redmain of course!—I don't know what you mean, Sepia."

"You said your heart was breaking: who is it for?" asked Sepia, almost imperiously, and raising her voice a little.

"Sepia!" cried Hesper, in bewilderment.

"Why should your heart be breaking, except you loved somebody?"

"Because I hate *him*," answered Hesper.

"Pooh! is that all?" returned Miss Yolland. "If there were anybody you wanted—then I grant!"

"Sepia!" said Hesper, almost entreatingly, "I cannot bear to be teased to-day. Do be open with me. You always puzzle me so! I don't understand you a bit better than the first day you came to us. I have got used to you—that is all. Tell me—are you my friend, or are you in league with mamma? I have my doubts. I can't help it, Sepia."

She looked in her face pitifully. Miss Yolland looked at her calmly, as if waiting for her to finish.

"I thought you would—not help me," Hesper went on, "—that no one can except God—he could strike me

dead; but I did think you would feel for me a little. I hate Mr. Redmain, and I loathe myself. If *you* laugh at me, I shall take poison."

"I wouldn't do that," returned Miss Yolland, quite gravely, and as if she had already contemplated the alternative; "—that is, not so long as there was a turn of the game left."

"The game!" echoed Hesper. "—Playing for love with the devil!—I wish the game were yours, as you call it!"

"Mine I'd make it, if I had it to play," returned Sepia. "I wish I were the other player instead of you, but the man hates me. Some men do.—Come," she went on, "I will be open with you, Hesper; you don't hang for thoughts in England. I will tell you what I would do with a man I hated—that is, if I was compelled to marry him;—it would hardly be fair otherwise, and I have a weakness for fair play.—I would give him absolute fair play."

The last three words she spoke with a strange expression of mingled scorn and jest, then paused, and seemed to have said all she meant to say.

"Go on," sighed Hesper; "you amuse me." Her tone expressed anything but amusement. "What would a woman of your experience do in my place?"

Sepia fixed a momentary look on Hesper; the words seemed to have stung her. She knew well enough that if Lady Malice came to know anything of her real history, she would have bare time to pack up her small belongings. She wanted Hesper married, that she might go with her into the world again; at the same time she feared her marriage with Mr. Redmain would hardly favour her wishes. But she could not with prudence do anything expressly to prevent it; while she might even

please Mr. Redmain a little, if she were supposed to have used influence on his side. That, however, must not seem to Hesper. Sepia did not yet know in fact upon what ground she had to build.

For some time she had been trying to get nearer to Hesper, but—much like Hesper's experience with her—. had found herself strangely baffled, she could not tell how—the barrier being simply the half innocence, half ignorance, of Hesper. When minds are not the same, words do not convey betwixt them.

She gave a ringing laugh, throwing back her head, and showing all her fine teeth.

"You want to know what I would do with a man I hated, as you *say* you hate Mr. Redmain?—I would send for him at once—not wait for him to come to me—and entreat him, *as he loved me*, to deliver me from the dire necessity of obeying my father. If he were a gentleman, as I hope he may be, he would manage to get me out of it somehow, and wouldn't compromise me a hair's-breadth. But that is, *if I were you.* If I were *myself* in your circumstances, and hated him as you do, that would not serve my turn. I would ask him all the same to set me free, but I would behave myself so that he could not do it. While I begged him, I mean, I should make him feel he could not—should make him absolutely determined to marry me, at any price to him, and at whatever cost to me. He should say to himself that I did not mean what I said—as indeed, for the sake of my revenge, I should not. For that I would give anything—supposing always, don't you know? that I hated him as you do Mr. Redmain. He should declare to me it was impossible; that he would die rather than give up the most precious desire of his life—and all that rot, you know. I would tell him I hated him—only so that he

should not believe me. I would say to him, 'Release me, Mr. Redmain, or I will make you repent it. I have given you fair warning. I have told you I hated you.' He should persist, should marry me, and then I *would*."

"Would what?"

"Do as I said."

"But what?"

"Make him repent it."

With the words, Miss Yolland broke into a second fit of laughter, and turning from Hesper, went, with a kind of loitering, strolling pace towards the door, glancing round more than once, each time with a fresh bubble rather than ripple in her laughter. Whether it was all nonsensical merriment, or whether the author of laughter without fun, Beelzebub himself, was at the moment stirring in her, Hesper could not have told; as it was, she sat staring after her, unable even to think. Just as she reached the door, however, she turned quickly, and, with the smile of a hearty, innocent child, or something very like it, ran back to Hesper, threw her arms round her, and said,—

"There now! I've done for you what I could: I have made you forget the odious man for a moment. I was curious to know whether I could not make a bride forget her bridegroom. The other thing is too easy."

"What other thing?"

"To make a bridegroom forget his bride, of course, you silly child!—But there I am, off again! when really it is time to be serious, and come to the only important point in the matter.—In what shade of purity do you think of ascending the funeral pyre?—In absolute white? —or rose-tinged?—or cream-coloured?—or gold-suspect? —Eh, happy bride?"

As she ceased, she turned her head away, pulled out her handkerchief, and whimpered a little.

"Sepia!" said Hesper, annoyed, "you are a worse goose than I thought you! What have *you* got to cry about? *You* have not got to marry him!"

"No; I wish I had!" returned Sepia, wiping her eyes. "Then I shouldn't lose you. I should take care of that."

"And am I likely to gain such a friend in Mr. Redmain as to afford the loss of the only *other* friend I have?" said Hesper calmly.

"Ah, Hesper! a sad experience has taught me differently. The moment you are married to the man—as married you will be—you all are—bluster as you may—that moment you will begin to change into a wife—a domesticated animal, that is—a tame tabby. Unwilling a woman must be to confess herself only the better half of a low-bred brute, with a high varnish—or not, as the case may be; and there is nothing left her to do but set herself to find out the wretch's virtues, or, as he hasn't got any, to invent for him the least unlikely ones. She wants for her own sake to believe in him, don't you know? Then she begins to repent having said hard words of the poor gentleman. The next thing of course will be, that you begin to hate the person to whom you said them, and to persuade yourself she drew them out of you; and so you break off all communication with the obnoxious person; who being, in the present instance, that black-faced sheep, Sepia Yolland, she is very sorry beforehand, and hates Mr. Redmain with all her heart; first, because Hesper Mortimer hates him, and next, but twice as much, because she is going to love him. It is a great pity *you* should have him, Hesper. I wish you would hand him over to me. *I* shouldn't mind what he was. I should soon tame him."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Hesper, with righteous indignation. "*You would not mind what he was!*"

Sepia laughed—this time her curious, half-laugh.

"If I did, I wouldn't marry him, Hesper," she said. "—Which is worse—not to mind, and marry him; or to mind, and marry him all the same? Eh, Cousin Hesper Mortimer?"

"I *can't* make you out, Sepia!" said Hesper. "I believe I never shall."

"Very likely. Give it up?"

"Quite."

"The best thing you could do. I can't always make myself out. But then I always give it up directly, and so it does me no harm. But it's ten times worse to worry your poor little heart to rags about such a man as that; he's not worth a thought from a grand creature like you. Where's the use, besides? Would you stand staring at your medicine a whole day before the time for taking it comes? I wouldn't have my right leg cut off because that is the side my dog walks on, and dogs go mad! Slip, cup, and lip—don't you know? The man may be underground long before the wedding-day: he's anything but sound, they tell me. But it would be far better soon after it, of course. Think only—a young widow, rich, and not a straw the worse!"

"Sepia, I can't for the life of me tell whether you are a Job's comforter, or the devil's advocate."

"Not the latter, my child; for I want to see you emerge a saint from the miseries of matrimony. But whatever you do, Hesper, don't break your heart, for you will find it hard to mend. I broke mine once, and have been mad ever since."

"What is the use of saying that to me, when you know I have to marry the man?"

"I never said you were not to marry him; I said you were not to break your heart. Marriage is nothing so long as you don't make a heart-affair of it: that hurts; and, as you are not in love, there is no occasion for it at all."

"Marriage is nothing, Sepia! Is it nothing to be tied to a man—to *any* man—for all your life?"

"That's as you take it. Nobody makes so much of it now-a-days as they used. The clergy themselves, who are at the bottom of all the business, don't fuss about every trifle in the prayer-book. They sign the articles, and have done with it—meaning of course to break them, if they stand in their way."

Hesper rose in anger.

"How dare you—" she began.

"Good gracious!" cried Sepia; "you don't imagine I meant anything so wicked! How could you let such a thing come into your head? I declare you are quite dangerous to talk to!"

"It's such a horrible business," said Hesper, "it seems to make one capable of anything wicked only to think about it. I would rather not say another word on the subject."

A shudder ran through her, as if at the sight of some hideously offensive object.

"That would be the best thing," said Sepia, "if it meant not think more about it. Everything is better for not being thought about. I would do anything to comfort you, dear. I would marry him for you, if that would do; but I fear it would scarcely meet the views of Herr Papa. If I could please the beast as well—and I think I should in time—I would willingly hand him the

purchase-money. But of course he would scorn to touch it, except as the proceeds of the *bonâ-fide* sale of his own flesh and blood."

## CHAPTER XIV.

### UNGENEROUS BENEVOLENCE.

As the time went on, and Letty saw nothing more of Tom, she began to revive a little, and feel as if she were growing safe again. The tide of temptation was ebbing away; there would be no more deceit; never again would she place herself in circumstances whence might arise any necessity for concealment. She began, much too soon, alas! to feel as if she were new-born: nothing worthy of being called a new birth can take place anywhere but in the will, and poor Letty's will was not yet old enough to give birth to anything; it scarcely indeed existed. The past was rapidly receding, that was all, and had begun to look dead, and as if it wanted only to be buried out of her sight. For what is done is done, in small faults as well as in murders; and as nothing can recall it, or make it not be, where can be the good in thinking about it?—a reasoning worse than dangerous, before one has left off being capable of the same thing over again. Still, in the mere absence of renewed offence, it is well that some shadow of peace should return; else how should men remember the face of innocence? or how should they live long enough to learn to repent? But for such breaks, would not some grow worse at full gallop?

That the idea of Tom's friendship was very pleasant to her, who can blame her? He had never said he

loved her; he had only said she was lovely: was she therefore bound to persuade herself he meant nothing at all? Was it not as much as could be required of her, that, in her modesty, she took him for no more than a true, kind friend, who would gladly be of service to her? Ah! if Tom had but been that! If he was not, he did not know it, which is something to say both for and against him. It could not be other than pleasant to Letty to have one, in her eyes so superior, who would talk to her as an equal. It was not that ever she resented being taught; but she did get tired of lessons only, beautiful as they were. A kiss from Mrs. Wardour, or a little teasing from Cousin Godfrey, would have done far more than all his intellectual labour upon her, to lift her feet above such snares as she was now walking amidst. She needed some play—a thing far more important to life than a great deal of what is called business and acquirement. Many a matter over which grown people look important, long-faced, and consequential, is folly compared with the merest child's frolic, in relation to the true affairs of existence.

All the time, Letty had not in the least neglected her house-duties; and again her readings with her cousin Godfrey, since Tom's apparent recession, had begun to revive in interest. He grew kinder and kinder to her, more and more fatherly.

But the mother, once disquieted, had lost no time in taking measures. In every direction, secretly, through friends, she was inquiring after some situation suitable for Letty: she owed it to herself, she said, to find for the girl the right thing, before sending her from the house. In the true spirit of benevolent tyranny, she said not a word to Letty of her design. She had the chronic distemper of concealment, where Letty had but a feverish

attack. Much false surmise might have been corrected, and much evil avoided, had she put it in Letty's power to show how gladly she would leave Thornwick. In the meantime the old lady kept her lynx-eye upon the young people.

But Godfrey, having caught a certain expression in the said eye, came to the resolution that thenceforth their school-room should be the common sitting-room. This would aid him in carrying out his resolve of a cautious and staid demeanour towards his pupil. To preserve his freedom, he must keep himself thoroughly in hand. Experience had taught him that, were he once to give way and show his affection, there would from that moment be an end of teaching and learning. And yet so much was he drawn to the girl, that, at this very time, he gave her the manuscript of his own verses to which I have referred—a volume exquisitely written, and containing, certainly, the outcome of the best that was in him: he did not tell her that he had copied them all with such care and neatness, and had the book so lovelily bound, expressly and only for her eyes.

News of something that seemed likely to suit her ideas for Letty at length came to Mrs. Wardour's ears, whereupon she thought it time to prepare the girl for the impending change. One day, therefore, as she herself sat knitting one sock for Godfrey, and Letty darning another, she opened the matter.

"I am getting old, Letty," she said, "and you can't be here always. You are a thoughtless creature, but I suppose you have the sense to see that?"

"Yes, indeed, aunt," answered Letty.

"It is high time you should be thinking," Mrs. Wardour went on, "how you are to earn your bread. If you left it till I was gone, you would find it very awkward,

for you would have to leave Thornwick at once, and I don't know who would take you while you were looking out. I must see you comfortably settled before I go."

"Yes, aunt."

"There are not many things you could do."

"No, aunt; very few. But I should make a better housemaid than most—I do believe that."

"I am glad to find you willing to work; but we shall be able, I trust, to do a little better for you than that. A situation as housemaid would reflect little credit on my pains for you—would hardly correspond to the education you have had."

Mrs. Wardour referred to the fact that Letty was for about a year a day-boarder at a ladies' school in Testbridge, where no immortal soul, save that of a genius, which can provide its own sauce, could have taken the least interest in the chaff and chopped straw that composed the provender.

"It is true," her aunt went on, "you might have made a good deal more of it, if you had cared to do your best; but such as you are, I trust we shall find you a very tolerable situation as governess."

At the word, Letty's heart ran half-way up her throat. A more dreadful proposal she could not have imagined. She felt, and was, utterly insufficient for—indeed incapable of such an office. She felt she knew nothing: how was she to teach anything? Her heart seemed to grow grey within her. By nature, from lack of variety of experience, yet more from daily repression of her natural joyousness, she was exceptionally apprehensive where anything was required of her. What she understood she encountered willingly and bravely; but the simplest thing that seemed to involve any element of obscurity, she dreaded like a dragon in his den.

"You don't seem to relish the proposal, Letty," said Mrs. Wardour. "I hope you had not taken it in your head that I meant to leave you independent. What I have done for you, I have done purely for your father's sake. I was under no obligation to take the least trouble about you. But I have more regard to your welfare than I fear you give me credit for."

"Oh aunt! it's only that I'm not fit for being a governess. I shouldn't a bit mind being dairymaid or housemaid. I would go to such a place to-morrow if you liked."

"Letty, your tastes may be vulgar, but you owe it to your family to look at least like a lady."

"But I am not scholar enough for a governess, aunt."

"That is not my fault. I sent you to a good school. Now, I will find you a good situation, and you must contrive to keep it."

"Oh, aunt! let me stay here—just as I am. Call me your dairymaid, or your housemaid. It is all one—I do the work now."

"Do you mean to reflect on me that I have required menial offices of you? I have been to you in the place of a mother; and it is for me, not for you, to make choice of your path in life."

"Do you want me to go at once?" asked Letty, her heart sinking again, and her voice trembling with a pathos her aunt quite misunderstood.

"As soon as I have secured for you a desirable situation—not before," answered Mrs. Wardour, in a tone generously protective.

Her affection for the girl had never been deep; and the moment she fancied she and her son were drawing towards each other, she became to her the thawed adder: she wished the adder well, but was she bound to harbour it after it had begun to bite? There are who never

learn to see anything except in its relation to themselves, nor that relation except as fancied by themselves; and this being a withering habit of mind, they keep growing drier, and older, and smaller, and deader, the longer they live—thinking less of other people, and more of themselves and their past experience, all the time as they go on withering.

But Mrs. Wardour was in some dread of what her son would say when he came to know what she had been doing; for when we are not at ease with ourselves, when conscience keeps moving as if about to speak, then we dread the disapproval of the lowliest, and Godfrey was the only one before whom his mother felt any kind of awe. Towards him, therefore, she kept silence for the present. If she had spoken then, things might have gone very differently: it might have brought Godfrey to the point of righteous resolve, or of passionate utterance. He could not well have opposed his mother's design without going farther, and declaring that, if Letty would, she should remain where she was, the mistress of the house. If not the feeling of what was due to her, the dread of the house without her might well have brought him to this.

Letty, for her part, believed her cousin Godfrey regarded her with pity, and showed her kindness from a generous sense of duty; she was a poor dull creature for whom her cousin must do what he could: one word of genuine love from him—one word even of such love as was in him, would have caused her nature to shoot heavenward, and spread out earthward, with a rapidity that would have astonished him; she would thereby have come into her spiritual property at once, and heaven would have opened to her—a little way at least—probably to close again for a time. Now she felt crushed.

The idea of undertaking that for which she knew herself so ill-fitted, was not merely odious, but frightful to her. She was ready enough to work, but it must be real, not sham work. She must see and consult Mary! This was quite another affair from Tom! She would take the first opportunity. In the meantime there was nothing to be done or said; and with a heavy heart she held her peace —only longed for her own room, that she might have a cry. To her comfort the clock struck ten, and all that now lay between her and that refuge was the usual round of the house with Mrs. Wardour, to see all safe for the night. That done, they parted, and Letty went slowly and sadly up the stair. It was a dark prospect before her. At best she had to leave the only home she remembered, and go among strangers.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE MOONLIGHT.

It was a still frosty night, with a full moon. When she reached her chamber, Letty walked mechanically to the window, and there stood, with the candle in her hand, looking carelessly out, nor taking any pleasure in the great night. The window looked on an open grassy yard, where were a few large ricks of wheat, shining yellow in the cold far-off moon. Between the moon and the earth hung a faint mist, which the thin clouds of her breath seemed to mingle with and augment. There lay her life—out of doors—dank and dull, all the summer faded from it—all its atmosphere a growing fog! She would never see Tom again! It was six weeks since she saw him last! He must have ceased to think of her by

this time! And if he did think of her again, she would be far off, nobody knew where.

Something struck the window with a slight, sharp clang. It was winter, and there were no moths or other insects flying. What could it be? She put her face close to the pane, and looked out. There was a man in the shadow of one of the ricks! He had his hat off, and was beckoning to her. It could be nobody but Tom! The thought sent to her heart a pang of mingled pleasure and pain. Clearly he wanted to speak to her! How gladly she would! but then would come again all the trouble of conscious deceit: how was she to bear that all over again! Still, if she was going to be turned out of the house so soon, what would it matter? If her aunt was going to compel her to be her own mistress, where was the harm if she began it a few days sooner? What did it matter anyhow what she did? But she dared not speak to him! Mrs. Wardour's ears were as sharp as her eyes. The very sound of her own voice in the moonlight would terrify her. She opened the lattice softly, and gently shaking her head —she dared not shake it vigorously—was on the point of closing it again, when, making frantic signs of entreaty, the man stepped into the moonlight, and it was plainly Tom. It was too dreadful! He might be seen any moment! She shook her head again, in a way she meant, and he understood, to mean she dared not. He fell on his knees and laid his hands together like one praying. Her heart interpreted the gesture as indicating that he was in trouble, and that therefore he begged her to go to him; with sudden resolve she nodded acquiescence, and left the window.

Her room was in a little wing projecting from the back of the house, over the kitchen. The servants' rooms were in another part, but Letty forgot a tiny window in one of

them, which looked also upon the ricks. There was a back stair to the kitchen, and in the kitchen a door to the farm-yard. She stole down the stair, and opened the door with absolute noiselessness. In a moment more she had stolen on tiptoe round the corner, and was creeping like a ghost among the ricks. Not even a rustle betrayed her as she came up to Tom from behind. He still knelt where she had left him, looking up to her window, which gleamed like a dead eye in the moonlight. She stood for a moment, afraid to move, lest she should startle him, and he should call out, for the slightest noise about the place would bring Godfrey down. The next moment however, Tom, aware of her presence, sprang to his feet, and turning, bounded to her, and took her in his arms. Still possessed by the one terror of making a noise, she did not object even by a contrary motion, and when he took her hand to lead her away out of sight of the house, she yielded at once.

When they were safe in the field behind the hedge,—

"Why did you make me come down, Tom?" she whispered, half choked with fear, looking up in his face, which was radiant in the moonshine.

"Because I could not bear it one day longer," he answered. "All this time I have been breaking my heart to get a word with you, and never seeing you except at church, and there you would never even look at me. It is cruel of you, Letty. I know you could manage it if you liked, well enough. Why should you try me so?"

"Do speak a little lower, Tom: sound goes so far at night!—I didn't know you would want to see me like that," she answered, looking up in his face with a pleased smile.

"Didn't know!" repeated Tom. "I want nothing else, think of nothing else, dream of nothing else. Oh, the de-

light of having you here all alone to myself at last! You darling Letty!"

"But I must go directly, Tom. I have no business to be out of the house at this time of the night. If you hadn't made me think you were in some trouble, I daredn't have come."

"And ain't I in trouble enough—trouble that nothing but your coming could get me out of? To love your very shadow, and not be able to get a peep even of that, except in church, where all the time of the service I'm raging inside like a wild beast in a cage—ain't that trouble enough to make you come to me?"

Letty's heart leaped up. He loved her then! Love, real love, was what it meant! It was paradise! Anything might come that would! She would be afraid of nothing any more. They might say or do to her what they pleased —she did not care a straw, if he loved her—really loved her! And he did! he did! She was going to have him all to her own self, and nobody was to have any right to meddle with her more!

"I didn't know you loved me, Tom!" she said simply, with a little gasp.

"And I don't know yet whether you love me," returned Tom.

"Of course, if you love *me*," answered Letty, as if everybody must give back love for love.

Tom took her again in his arms, and Letty was in greater bliss than she had ever dreamed possible. From being a nobody in the world, she might now queen it to the top of her modest bent; from being looked down on by everybody, she had the whole earth under her feet; from being utterly friendless, she had the heart of Tom Helmer for her own! Yet even then, eluding the barriers of Tom's arms, shot to her heart, sharp as an arrow, the

thought that she was forsaking Cousin Godfrey. She did not attempt to explain it to herself; she was in too great confusion, even if she had been capable of the necessary analysis. It came, probably, of what her aunt had told her concerning her cousin's opinion of Tom. Often and often since, she had said to herself that of course Cousin Godfrey was mistaken, and quite wrong in not liking Tom; she was sure he would like him if he knew him as she did!—and yet to act against his opinion, and that never uttered to herself, cost her this sharp pang, and not a few that followed! To soften it for the moment, however, came the vaguely, sadly reproachful feeling, that, seeing they were about to send her out into the world to earn her bread, they had no more any right to make such demands upon her loyalty to them, as should exclude the closest and only satisfying friend she had—one who would not turn her away, but wanted to have her for ever. That Godfrey knew nothing of his mother's design, she did not once suspect.

"Now, Tom, you have seen me, and spoken to me, and I must go," said Letty.

"Oh Letty!" cried Tom reproachfully, "now when we understand each other? Would you leave me in the very moment of my supremest bliss? That would be mockery, Letty! That is the way my dreams serve me always. But surely you are no dream! Perhaps I *am* dreaming, and shall wake to find myself alone! I never was so happy in my life, and you want to leave me all alone in the mid-night, with the moon to comfort me! Do as you like, Letty!—I won't leave the place till the morning. I will go back to the rickyard, and lie under your window all night."

The idea of Tom out on the cold ground, while she was warm in bed, was too much for Letty's childish heart.

Had she known Tom better, she would not have been afraid: she would have known that he would indeed do as he had said—so far; that he would lie down under her window, and there remain, even to the very moment when he began to feel miserable, and a moment longer, but not more than two; that then he would get up, and, with a last look, start home for bed.

"I will stop a little while, Tom," she offered, "if you will promise to go home as soon as I leave you."

Tom promised.

They went wandering along the farm lanes, and Tom made love to her, as the phrase is—in his case, alas! a phrase only too correct. I do not say, or wish understood, that he did not love her—with such love as lay in the immediate power of his development; but being a sort of a poet, such as a man may be who loves the form of beauty, but not the indwelling power of it, that is, the truth, he *made* love to her—fashioned forms of love, and offered them to her; and she accepted them, and found the words of them very dear and very lovely. For neither had she got far enough, with all Godfrey's endeavours for her development, to love aright the ring of the true gold, and therefore was not able to distinguish the dull sound of the gilt brass Tom offered her. Poor fellow! it was all he had. But compassion itself can hardly urge that as a reason for accepting it for genuine. What rubbish most girls will take for poetry, and with it heap up impassably their door to the garden of delights! what French polish they will take for refinement! what merest French gallantry for love! what French sentiment for passion! what commonest passion they will take for devotion!—passion that has little to do with their beauty even, still less with the individuality of it, and nothing at all with their loveliness!

In justice to Tom I must add, however, that he also took not a little rubbish for poetry, much sentiment for pathos, and all passion for love. He was no intentional deceiver; he was so self-deceived, that, being himself a deception, he could be nothing but a deceiver—at once the most complete and the most pardonable, and perhaps the most dangerous of deceivers.

With all his fine talk of love, to which he now gave full flow, it was characteristic of him that, although he saw Letty without hat or cloak, just because he was himself warmly clad he never thought of her being cold, until the arm he had thrown round her waist felt her shiver. Thereupon he was kind, and would have insisted that she should go in and get a shawl, had she not positively refused to go in and come out again. Then he would have had her put on his coat, that she might be able to stay a little longer; but she prevailed on him to let her go. He brought her to the nearest point not within sight of any of the windows, and there leaving her, set out at a rapid pace for the inn where he had put up his mare.

When Tom was gone, and the bare night, a diffused conscience, all about her, Letty, with a strange fear at her heart, like one in a churchyard, with the ghost-hour at hand, and feeling like "a guilty thing surprised," although she had done nothing wrong in its mere self, stole back to the door of the kitchen, longing for the shelter of her own room, as never exile for his fatherland.

She had left the door an inch ajar, that she might run the less risk of making a noise in opening it; but ere she reached it, the moon shining full upon it, she saw plainly, and her heart turned sick when she saw, that it was closed. Between cold and terror she shuddered from head to foot, and stood staring.

Recovering a little, she said to herself some draught

must have blown it to. If so, there was much danger that the noise had been heard; but in any case there was no time to lose. She glided swiftly to it. She lifted the latch softly—but, horror of horrors! in vain. The door was locked. She was shut out. She must lie, or confess! And what lie would serve? Poor Letty! And yet, for all her dismay, her terror, her despair that night, in her innocence she never once thought of the worst danger in which she stood!

The least perilous, where no safe way was left, would now have been to let the simple truth appear; Letty ought immediately to have knocked at the door, and should that have proved unavailing, to have broken her aunt's window even, to gain hearing and admittance. But that was just the kind of action of which, truthful as was her nature, poor Letty, both by constitution and training, was incapable: human opposition, superior anger, condemnation, she dared not encounter. She sank, more than half fainting, upon the door-step.

The moment she came to herself, apprehension changed into active dread, rushed into uncontrollable terror. She sprang to her feet, and, the worst thing she could do, fled like the wind after Tom—now indeed, she imagined, her only refuge! She knew where he had put up his horse, and knew he could hardly take any other way than the foot-path to Testbridge. He could not be more than a few yards ahead of her, she thought. Presently she heard him whistling, she was sure, as he walked leisurely along, but she could not see him. The way was mostly between hedges until it reached the common: there she would catch sight of him, for, notwithstanding the gauzy mist, the moon gave plenty of light. On she went swiftly, still fancying at intervals she heard in front of her his whistle,

and even his step on the hard-frozen path. In her eager anxiety to overtake him, she felt neither the chilling air, nor the fears of the night and the loneliness. Dismay was behind her, and hope before her. On and on she ran. But when, with now failing breath, she reached the common, and saw it lie so bare and wide in the moonlight, with the little hut standing on its edge, like a ghastly lodge to nowhere, with gaping black holes for door and window, then indeed the horror of her deserted condition, and the terrors of the night, began to crush their way into her soul. What might not be lurking in that ruin, ready to wake at the lightest rustle, and, at sight of a fleeing girl, start out in pursuit, and catch her by the hair that now streamed behind her! And there was the hawthorn, so old and grotesquely contorted, always bringing to her mind a frightful German print at the head of a poem called The Haunted Heath, in one of her cousin Godfrey's books! It was like an old miser, decrepit with age, pursued and unable to run! Miserable as was her real condition, it was rendered yet more pitiful by these terrors of the imagination. The distant howl of a dog which the moon would not let sleep, the muffled low of a cow from a shippen, and a certain strange sound, coming again and again, which she could not account for, all turned to things unnatural, therefore frightful. Faintly, once or twice, she tried to persuade herself that it was only a horrible dream from which she would wake in safety; but it would not do; it was, alas! all too real—hard, killing fact! Anyhow, dream or fact, there was no turning; on to the end she must go. More frightful than all possible dangers, most frightful thing of all, was the old house she had left, standing silent in the mist, holding her room inside it empty, the candle burning away in the face of the moon! Across the common

she glided like a swift wraith, and again into the shadow of the hedges.

There seems to be a hope as well as a courage born of despair: immortal, yet inconstant children of a death-doomed sire, both were now departing. If Tom had come this way, she must, she thought, have overtaken him long before now! But perhaps she had fainted outright, and lain longer than she knew at the kitchen door; and when she started to follow him, Tom was already at home! Alas, alas! she was lost utterly!

The footpath came to an end, and she was on the high road. There was the inn where Tom generally put up! It was silent as the grave. The clang of a horse-shoe striking a stone came through the frosty air, from far along the road. Her heart sank into the depths of the infinite sea that encircles the soul, and, for the second time that night, Death passing by gave her an alms of comfort, and she lay insensible on the border of the same highway along which Tom, on his bay mare, went singing home.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE MORNING.

At Thornwick, Tom had been descried in the yard, by the spying organs of one of the servants—a woman not very young, and not altogether innocent of nightly interviews. Through the small window of her closet she had seen, and having seen she watched—not without hope she might be herself the object of the male presence, which she recognized as that of Tom Helmer, whom almost everybody knew. In a few minutes, however, Letty appeared behind him, and therewith a throb

of evil joy shot through her bosom: what a chance! what a good joke! what a thing for her to find out Miss Letty; to surprise her naughty secret! to have her in her power! She would have no choice but tell her everything—and then what privileges would be hers! and what larks they two would have together, helping each other! She had not a thought of betraying her: there would be no fun in that! not the less would she encourage a little the fear that she might, for it would be as a charm in her bosom to work her will withal!—To make sure of Letty and her secret, partly also in pure delight of mischief, and enjoyment of the power to tease, she stole down stairs, and locked the kitchen door—the bolt of which, for reasons of her own, she kept well oiled; then sat down in an old rocking-chair, and waited—I cannot say watched, for she fell fast aleep. Letty lifted the latch almost too softly for her to have heard had she been awake; but on the door-step Letty, had she been capable of listening, might have heard her snoring.

When the young woman awoke in the cold grey of the morning, and came to herself, compunction seized her. Opening the door softly, she went out and searched everywhere; then, having discovered no trace of Letty, left the door unlocked, and went to bed, hoping she might yet find her way into the house before Mrs. Wardour was down.

When that lady awoke at the usual hour, and heard no sound of stir, she put on her dressing-gown, and went, in the anger of a housekeeper, to Letty's room: there, to her amazement and horror, she saw the bed had lain all the night expectant. She hurried thence to the room occupied by the girl who was the cause of the mischief. Roused suddenly by the voice of her mistress, she got up half awake, and sleepy-headed; and, assailed by a torrent

of questions, answered so, in her confusion, as to give the initiative to others: before she was well awake, she had told all she had seen from the window, but nothing of what she had herself done. Mrs. Wardour hurried to the kitchen, found the door on the latch, believed everything and much more, went straight to her son's room, and, in a calm rage, woke him up, and poured into his unwilling ears a torrent of mingled fact and fiction, wherein floated side by side with Letty's name every bad adjective she could bring the lips of propriety to utter. Before he quite came to himself the news had well-nigh driven him mad. There stood his mother, dashing her cold hailstorm of contemptuous wrath on the girl he loved, whom he had gone to bed believing the sweetest creature in creation, and loving himself more than she dared show! He had been dreaming of her with the utmost tenderness, when his mother woke him with the news that she had gone in the night with Tom Helmer, the poorest creature in the neighbourhood.

"For God's sake, mother," he cried, "go away, and let me get up!"

"What can you do, Godfrey? What is there to be done? Let the jade go to her ruin!" cried Mrs. Wardour, alarmed in the midst of her wrath. "You *can* do nothing now. As she has made her bed, so she must lie."

Her words were torture to him. He sprang from his bed, and proceeded to pull on his clothes. Terrified at the wildness of his looks, his mother fled from the room, but only to watch at the door.

Scarcely could Godfrey dress himself for agitation; brain and heart seemed to mingle in chaotic confusion. Anger strove with unbelief, and indignation at his mother with the sense of bitter wrong from Letty. It was all incredible and shameful, yet not the less utterly miserable.

The girl whose Idea lay in the innermost chamber of his heart like the sleeping beauty in her palace! while he loved and ministered to her outward dream-shape which flitted before the eyes of his sense, in the hope that at last the Idea would awake, and come forth and inform it!—he dared not follow the thought! it was madness and suicide! He had been silently worshipping an angel with wings not yet matured to the spreading of themselves to the winds of truth; those wings were a little maimed, and he had been tending them with precious balms, and odours, and ointments: all at once she had turned into a bat, a skin-winged creature that flies by night, and had disappeared in the darkness! Of all possible mockeries, for *her* to steal out at night to the embraces of a fool! a wretched, weak-headed, idle fellow, whom every clown called by his Christian name! an ass that did nothing but ride the country on a horse too good for him, and quarrel with his mother from Sunday to Saturday! For such a man she had left him, Godfrey Wardour! a man who would have lifted her to the height of her nature! whereas the fool Helmer would sink her to the depth of his own merest nothingness! The thing was inconceivable! yet it was! He knew it: they were all the same! Never woman worthy of true man! The poorest show would take them captive, would draw them from reason!

He knew *now* that he loved the girl. Gnashing his teeth with fellest rage, he caught from the wall his heaviest hunting-whip, rushed heedless past his mother where she waited on the landing, and out of the house.

In common with many, he thought worse of Tom Helmer than he yet deserved. He was a characterless fool, a trifler, a poetic babbler, a good-for-nothing good sort of fellow; that was the worst that as yet was true of him; and better things might with equal truth have been

said of him, had there been any one that loved him enough to know them.

Godfrey ran to the stable, and to the stall of his fastest horse. As he threw the saddle over his back, he almost wept in the midst of his passion at the sight of the bright stirrups. His hands trembled so that he failed repeatedly in passing the straps through the buckles of the girths. But the moment he felt the horse under him, he was stronger, set his head straight for the village of Warrender, where Tom's mother lived, and went away over everything. His crow-flight led him across the back of the house of Durnmelling. Hesper, who had not slept well, and found the early morning even a worse time to live in than the evening, saw him from her window, going straight as an arrow. The sight arrested her. She called Sepia, who for a few nights had slept in her room, to the window.

"There now!" she said, "there is a man who looks a man! Good heavens! how recklessly he rides! I don't believe Mr. Redmain could keep on a horse's back if he tried!"

Sepia looked, half asleep. Her eyes grew wider. Her sleepiness vanished.

"Something is wrong with the proud yeoman!" she said. "He is either mad or in love, probably both! We shall hear more of this morning's ride, Hesper, as I hope to die a maid!—That's a man I should like to know now," she added carelessly. "There is some go in him! I have a weakness for the kind of man that *could* shake the life out of me if I offended him."

"Are you so anxious then to make a good submissive wife?" said Hesper.

"I should take the very first opportunity of offending

him—mortally, as they call it. It would be worth one's while with a man like that."

"Why? How? For what good?"

"Just to see him look. There is nothing on earth so scrumptious as having a grand burst of passion all to yourself." She drew in her breath like one in pain. "My God!" she said, "to see it come and go! the white and the red! the tugging at the hair! the tears and the oaths, and the cries and the curses! To know that you have the man's heart-strings stretched on your violin, and that with one dash of your bow, one tiniest twist of a peg, you can make him shriek!"

"Sepia!" said Hesper, "I think Darwin must be right, and some of us at least are come from—"

"Tiger-cats? or perhaps the Tasmanian devil?" suggested Sepia, with one of her scornful half-laughs.

But the same instant she turned white as death, and sat softly down on the nearest chair.

"Good heavens, Sepia! what is the matter? I did not mean it," said Hesper remorsefully, thinking she had wounded her, and that she had broken down in the attempt to conceal the pain.

"It's not that, Hesper, dear. Nothing you could say would hurt me," replied Sepia, drawing breath sharply. "It's a pain that comes sometimes—a sort of picture drawn in pains—something I saw once."

"A picture?"

"Oh! well!—picture, or what you will!—Where's the difference, once it's gone and done with? Yet it will get the better of me now and then for a moment! Some day, when you are married, and a little more used to men and their ways, I will tell you. My little cousin is much too innocent now."

"But you have not been married, Sepia! What should you know about disgraceful things?"

"I will tell you when you are married, and not until then, Hesper. There's a bribe to make you a good child, and do as you must—that is, as your father and mother and Mr. Redmain would have you!"

While they talked, Godfrey, now seen, now vanishing, had become a speck in the distance. Crossing a wide field, he was now no longer to be distinguished from the grazing cattle, and so was lost to the eyes of the ladies.

By this time he had collected his thoughts a little, and it had grown plain to him that the last and only thing left him to do for Letty, was to compel Tom to marry her at once. "My mother will then have half her own way!" he said to himself bitterly. But, instead of reproaching himself that he had not drawn the poor girl's heart to his own, and saved her by letting her know that he loved her, he tried to congratulate himself on the pride and self-important delay which had preserved him from yielding his love to one who counted herself of so little value. He did not reflect that, if the value a woman places upon herself be the true estimate of her worth, the world is tolerably provided with utterly inestimable treasures of womankind; yet is it the meek who shall inherit it; and they who make least of themselves are those who shall be led up to the dais at last.

"But the wretch shall marry her at once," he swore. "Her character is nothing now but a withered flower in the hands of that woman. Even were she capable of holding her tongue, by this time a score must have seen them together."

Godfrey hardly knew what he was to gain by riding to Warrender, for how could he expect to find Tom there? and what could any one do with the mother?

Only, where else could he go first to learn anything about him? Some hint he might there get, suggesting in what direction to seek them. And he must be doing something, however useless: inaction at such a moment would be hell itself!

Arrived at the house—a well-appointed cottage, with outhouses larger than itself—he gave his horse to a boy to lead up and down, while he went through the gate and rang the bell in a porch covered with ivy. The old woman who opened the door said Master Tom was not up yet, but she would take his message. Returning presently, she asked him to walk in. He declined the hospitality, and remained in front of the house.

Tom was no coward, in the ordinary sense of the word: there was in him a good deal of what goes to the making of a gentleman; but he confessed to being "in a bit of a funk" when he heard who was below: there was but one thing it could mean, he thought—that Letty had been found out, and here was her cousin come to make a row. But what did it matter, so long as Letty was true to him? The world should know that Wardour nor Platt—his mother's maiden name!—nor any power on earth should keep from him the woman of his choice! As soon as he was of age he would marry her in spite of them all. But he could not help being a little afraid of Godfrey Wardour, for he admired him.

For Godfrey, he would have rather liked Tom Helmer, had he ever seen down into the best of him; but Tom's carelessness had so often mispresented him, that Godfrey had too huge a contempt for him. And now the miserable creature had not merely grown dangerous, but had of a sudden done him the greatest possible hurt! It was all Godfrey could do to keep his contempt and hate within what he would have called the bounds of reason,

as he waited for "the miserable mongrel." He kept walking up and down the little lawn, which a high shrubbery protected from the road, making a futile attempt, as often as he thought of the policy of it, to look unconcerned, and the next moment striking fierce, objectless blows with his whip. Catching sight of him from a window on the stair, Tom was so little reassured by his demeanour, that, crossing the hall, he chose from the stand a thick oak stick—poor odds against a hunting-whip in the hands of one like Godfrey, with the steel of ten years of manhood in him.

Tom's long legs came doubling carelessly down the two steps from the door, as, with a gracious wave of the hand, and swinging his cudgel as if he were just going out for a stroll, he coolly greeted his visitor. But the other, instead of returning the salutation, stepped quickly up to him.

"Mr. Helmer, where is Miss Lovel?" he said, in a low voice.

Tom turned pale, for a pang of undefined fear shot through him, and his voice betrayed genuine anxiety as he answered,—

"I do not know. What has happened?"

Wardour's fingers gripped convulsively his whip-handle, and the word *liar* had almost escaped his lips; but through the darkness of the tempest raging in him, he yet read truth in Tom's scared face and trembling words.

"You were with her last night," he said, grinding it out between his teeth.

"I was," answered Tom, looking more scared still.

"Where is she now?" demanded Godfrey again.

"I hope to God you know," answered Tom, "for I don't."

"Where did you leave her?" asked Wardour, in the tone of an avenger rather than a judge.

Tom, without a moment's hesitation, described the place with precision—a spot not more than a hundred yards from the house.

"What right had you to come sneaking about the place?" hissed Godfrey, a vain attempt to master an involuntary movement of the muscles of his face at once clenching and showing his teeth. At the same moment he raised his whip unconsciously.

Tom instinctively stepped back, and raised his stick in attitude of defence. Godfrey burst into a scornful laugh.

"You fool!" he said; "you need not be afraid; I can see you are speaking the truth. You dare not tell me a lie!"

"It is enough," returned Tom with dignity, "that I do not tell lies. I am not afraid of you, Mr. Wardour. What I dare or dare not do, is neither for you nor me to say. You are the older and stronger and every-way better man, but that gives you no right to bully me."

This answer brought Godfrey to a better sense of what became himself, if not of what Helmer could claim of him. Using positive violence over himself, he spoke next in a tone calm even to icyness.

"Mr. Helmer," he said, "I will gladly address you as a gentleman, if you will show me how it can be the part of a gentleman to go prowling about his neighbour's property after nightfall."

"Love acknowledges no law but itself, Mr. Wardour," answered Tom, inspired by the dignity of his honest affection for Letty. "Miss Lovel is not your property. I love her, and she loves me. I would do my best to see her, if Thornwick were the castle of Giant Blunderbore."

"Why not walk up to the house, like a man, in the daylight, and say you wanted to see her?"

"Should I have been welcome, Mr. Wardour?" said Tom significantly. "You know very well what my reception would have been; and I know better than throw difficulties in my own path. To do as you say would have been to make it next to impossible to see her."

"Well, we must find her now anyhow; and you must marry her off hand."

"Must!" echoed Tom, his eyes flashing, at once with anger at the word and with pleasure at the proposal. "Must?" he repeated, "when there is nothing in the world I desire or care for but to marry her! Tell me what it all means, Mr. Wardour; for, by heaven! I am utterly in the dark."

"It means just this—and I don't know but I am making a fool of myself to tell you—that the girl was seen in your company late last night, and has been neither seen nor heard of since."

"My God!" cried Tom, now first laying hold of the fact; and with the word, he turned and started for the stable. His run, however, broke down, and with a look of scared bewilderment he came back to Godfrey.

"Mr. Wardour," he said, "what am I to do? Please advise me. If we raise a hue and cry, it will set people saying all manner of things, pleasant neither for you nor for us."

"That is your business, Mr. Helmer," answered Godfrey, bitterly. "It is you who have brought this shame on her."

"You are a cold-hearted man," said Tom. "But there is no shame in the matter. I will soon make that clear—if only I knew where to go after her. The thing is to me utterly mysterious: there are neither robbers

nor wild beasts about Thornwick. What *can* have happened to her?"

He turned his back on Godfrey for a moment, then suddenly wheeling, broke out,—

"I will tell you what it is; I see it all now: she found out that she had been seen, and was too terrified to go into the house again!—Mr. Wardour," he continued, with a new look in his eyes, "I have more reason to be suspicious of you and your mother, than you have to suspect me. Your treatment of Letty has not been of the kindest."

So Letty had been accusing him of unkindness! Ready as he now was to hear anything to her disadvantage, it was yet a fresh stab to the heart of him. Was this the girl for whom, in all honesty and affection, he had sought to do so much! How could she say he was unkind to her?—and say it to a fellow like this! It was humiliating indeed! But he would not defend himself. Not to Tom, not to his mother, not to any living soul, would he utter a word even resembling blame of the girl! He at least would carry himself generously! Everything, though she had plunged his heart in a pitcher of gall, should be done for her sake! She should go to her lover, and leave blame behind her with him! His sole care should be that the windbag should not collapse, and slip out of it, that he should actually marry her; and as soon as he had handed him over to her in safety, he would have done with her, and with all women for ever, except his mother! Not once more would he speak to one of them in tone of friendship!

He looked at Tom, full in the eyes, and made him no answer.

"If I don't find Letty this very morning," said Tom, "I shall apply for a warrant to search your house: my uncle Rendall will give me one."

Godfrey smiled a smile of scorn, turned from him as a wise man turns from a fool, and went out of the gate.

He had just taken his horse from the boy and sent him off, when he saw a young woman coming hurriedly across the road, from the direction of Testbridge. Plainly she was on business of pressing import. She came nearer, and he saw it was Mary Marston. The moment she recognized Godfrey, she began to run to him; but when she came near enough to take notice of his mien, as he stood with his foot in the stirrup, with no word of greeting or look of reception, and inquiry only in every feature, her haste suddenly dropped, her flushed face turned pale, and she stood still, panting. Not a word could she utter, and was but just able to force a faint smile, with intent to reassure him.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE RESULT.

LETTY would never perhaps have come to herself in the cold of this world, under the shifting tent of the winter night, but for an outcast mongrel dog, which, wandering masterless and hungry, but not selfish, along the road, came upon her where she lay seemingly lifeless, and, recognizing with pity his neighbour in misfortune, began at once to give her—it was all he had that was separable—what help and healing might lie in a warm, honest tongue. Diligently he set himself to lick her face and hands.

By slow degrees her misery returned, and she sat up. Rejoiced at his success, the dog kept dodging about her, catching a lick here and a lick there, wherever he saw a spot of bare within his reach. By slow degrees, next,

the knowledge of herself joined on to the knowledge of her misery, and she knew who it was that was miserable. She threw her arms round the dog, laid her head on his, and wept. This relieved her a little: weeping is good, even to such as Alberigo in an ice-pot of hell. But she was cold to the very marrow, almost too cold to feel it; and when she rose, could scarcely put one foot before the other.

Not once, for all her misery, did she imagine a return to Thornwick. Without a thought of whither, she moved on, unaware even that it was in the direction of the town. The dog, delighted to believe that he had raised up to himself a mistress, followed humbly at her heel: but always when she stopped, as she did every few paces, ran round in front of her, and looked up in her face, as much as to say, "Here I am, mistress! shall I lick again?" If a dog could create, he would make masters and mistresses. Gladly would she then have fondled him, but feared the venture; for, it seemed, were she to stoop, she must fall flat on the road, and never rise more.

Slowly the two went on, with motion scarce enough to keep the blood moving in their veins. Had she not been, for all her late depression, in fine health and strength, Letty could hardly have escaped death from the cold of that night. For many months after, some portion of every night she passed in dreaming over again this dreariest wandering; and in her after-life people would be puzzled to think why Mrs. Helmer looked so angry when any one spoke as if the animals died outright.

But although she never forgot this part of the terrible night, she never dreamed of any rescue from it; memory could not join it on to the next part, for again she lost consciousness, and could recall nothing between feeling

the dog once more licking her face, and finding herself in bed.

When Beenie opened her kitchen-door in the morning, to let in the fresh air, she found seated on the step, and leaning against the wall, what she took first for a young woman asleep, and then for the dead body of one; for when she gave her a little shake, she fell sideways off the door-step. Beenie's heart smote her; for during the last hours of her morning's sleep she had been disturbed by the howling of a dog, apparently in their own yard, but had paid no further attention to it than that of repeated mental objurgation: there stood the offender, looking up at her pitifully—ugly, disreputable, of breed unknown, one of the *canaille!* When the girl fell down, he darted at her, licked her cold face for a moment, then stretching out a long gaunt neck, uttered from the depth of his hide-bound frame the most melancholy appeal, not to Beenie, at whom he would not even look again, but to the open door. But when Beenie, in whom, as in most of us, curiosity had the start of service, stooped, and peering more closely into the face of the girl, recognized, though uncertainly, a known face, she too uttered a kind of howl, and straightway raising Letty's head, drew her into the house. It is the mark of an imperfect humanity, that personal knowledge should spur the sides of hospitable intent: what difference does our knowing or not knowing make to the fact of human need? The good Samaritan would never have been mentioned by the mouth of the True, had he been even an old acquaintance of the "certain man." But it is thus we learn; and from loving this one and that, we come to love all at last, and then is our humanity complete.

Letty moved not one frozen muscle, and Beenie, growing terrified, flew up the stair to her mistress. Mary

sprung from her bed, and hurried down. There, on the kitchen floor, in front of the yet fireless grate, lay the body of Letty Lovel. A hideous dog was sitting on his haunches at her head. The moment she entered, again the animal stretched out a long bony neck, and sent forth a howl that rang penetrative through the house. It sounded in Mary's ears like the cry of the whole animal creation over the absence of their Maker. They raised her, and carried her to Mary's room. There they laid her in the still warm bed, and proceeded to use all possible means for the restoration of heat and the renewal of circulation.

Here I am sorry to have to mention, that Beenie, returning, unsuccessful, from their first efforts, to the kitchen, to get hot water, and finding the dog sitting there motionless, with his face turned towards the door by which they had carried Letty out, peevish with disappointment and dread, drove him from the kitchen, and from the court, into the street, where that same day he was seen wildly running with a pan at his tail, and the next was found lying dead in a bit of waste ground among stones and shards. God rest all such.

But as far as Letty was concerned, happily Beenie was not an old woman for nothing. With a woman's sympathy, Mary hesitated to run for the doctor: who could tell what might be involved in so strange an event? If they could but bring her to, first, and learn something to guide them! She pushed delay to the very verge of danger. But soon after, thanks to Beenie's persistence, indications of success appeared, and Letty began to breathe. It was then resolved between the nurses that, for the present, they would keep the affair to themselves, a conclusion affording much satisfaction to Beenie, in the consciousness that therein she had the better of the

Turnbulls, against whom she cherished an ever-renewed indignation.

But when Mary set herself at length to find out from Letty what had happened, without which she could not tell what to do next, she found her mind so far gone that she understood nothing said to her, or at least could return no rational response, although occasionally an individual word would seem to influence the current of her ideas. She kept murmuring almost inarticulately; but, to Mary's uneasiness, every now and then plainly uttered the name *Tom*. What was she to make of it? In terror lest she should betray her, she must yet do something. Matters could not have gone wrong so far that nothing could be done to set them at least a little straight! If only she knew what! A single false step might do no end of mischief! She must see Tom Helmer: without betraying Letty, she might get from him some enlightenment. She knew his open nature, had a better opinion of him than many had, and was a little nearer the right of him. The doctor must be called; but she would, if possible, see Tom first.

It was not more than half an hour's walk to Warrender, and she set out in haste. She must get back before George Turnbull came to open the shop.

When she got near enough to see Mr. Wardour's face, she read in it at once that he was there from the same cause as herself; but there was no good omen to be drawn from its expression: she read there not only keen anxiety and bitter disappointment, but lowering anger; nor was that absent which she felt to be distrust of herself. The sole acknowledgment he made of her approach was to withdraw his foot from the stirrup, and stand waiting.

"You know something," he said, looking cold and hard in her face.

"About what?" returned Mary, recovering herself; she was careful, for Letty's sake, to feel her way.

"I hope to goodness," returned Godfrey, almost fiercely, yet with a dash of rude indifference, "*you* are not concerned in this—business:" he was about to use a bad adjective, but suppressed it.

"I *am* concerned in it," said Mary, with perfect quietness.

"You knew what was going on?" cried Wardour. "You knew that fellow there came prowling about Thornwick like a fox about a henroost? By heaven! if I had but suspected it,—"

"No, Mr. Wardour," interrupted Mary already catching a glimpse of light, "I knew nothing of that."

"Then what do you mean by saying you are concerned in the matter?"

Mary thought he was behaving so unlike himself, that a shock might be of service.

"Only this," she answered, "—that Letty is now lying in my room, whether dead or alive I am in doubt. She must have spent the night in the open air—and that without cloak or bonnet."

"Good God!" cried Godfrey. "And you could leave her like that!"

"She is attended to," replied Mary with dignity. "There are worse evils to be warded than death, else I should not be here;—there are hard judgments and evil tongues.—Will you come and see her, Mr. Wardour?"

"No," answered Godfrey gruffly.

"Shall I send a note to Mrs. Wardour, then?"

"I will tell her myself."

"What would you have me do about her?"

"I have no concern in the matter, but I suppose you had better send for a doctor.—Talk to that fellow there," he added, pointing with his whip towards the cottage, and again putting his foot in the stirrup. "Tell him he has brought her to disgrace—"

"I don't believe it," interrupted Mary, her face flushing with indignant shame. But Godfrey went on without heeding her.

"—And get him to marry her off hand, if you can—for, by God! he *shall* marry her, or I will kill him."

He spoke looking round at her over his shoulder, a scowl on his face, his foot in the stirrup, one hand twisted in the mane of his horse, and the other with the whip stretched out as if threatening the universe. Mary stood white but calm, and made no answer. He swung himself into the saddle, and rode away. She turned to the gate.

From behind the shrubbery, Tom had heard all that passed between them, and meeting her as she entered, led the way to a side walk, unseen from the house.

"Oh, Miss Marston! what is to be done?" he said. "This is a terrible business! But I am so glad you have got her, poor girl! I heard all you said to that brute, Wardour. Thank you, thank you a thousand times, for taking her part. Indeed you spoke but the truth for her. Let me tell you all I know."

He had not much to tell, however, beyond what Mary knew already.

"She keeps calling out for you, Mr. Helmer," she said, when he had ended.

"I will go with you. Come, come," he answered.

"You will leave a message for your mother?"

"Never mind my mother. She's good at finding out for herself."

"She ought to be told," said Mary; "but I can't stop to argue it with you. Certainly your first duty is to Letty now. Oh, if people only wouldn't hide things!"

"Come along," cried Tom, hurrying before her; "I will soon set everything right."

"How shall we manage with the doctor?" said Mary as they went. "We cannot do without him, for I am sure she is in danger."

"Oh, no!" said Tom. "She will be all right when she sees me. But we will take the doctor on our way, and prepare him."

When they came to the doctor's house, Mary walked on, and Tom told the doctor he had met Miss Marston on her way to him, and had come instead: she wanted to let him know that Miss Lovel had come to her quite unexpected that morning; that she was delirious, and had apparently wandered from home under an attack of brain-fever, or something of the sort.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### MARY AND GODFREY.

EVERYTHING went very tolerably, so far as concerned the world of talk, in the matter of Letty's misfortunes. Rumours, it is true—and more than one of them strange enough—did for a time go floating about the country; but none of them came to the ears of Tom or of Mary, and Letty was safe from hearing anything; and the engagement between her and Tom soon became generally known.

Mrs. Helmer was very angry, and did all she could to make Tom break it off—it was so much below him! But in nothing could the folly of the woman have been

more apparent, than in her fancying, with the experience of her life before her, that any opposition of hers could be effectual otherwise than to the confirmation of her son's will. So short-sighted was she as to originate most of the reports to Letty's disadvantage; but Tom's behaviour, on the other hand, was strong to put them down; for the man is seldom found so faithful where such reports are facts.

Mrs. Wardour took care to say nothing unkind of Letty. She was of her own family; and, besides, not only was Tom a better match than she could have expected for her, but she was more than satisfied to have Godfrey's dangerous toy thus drawn away beyond his reach. As soon as ever the doctor gave his permission, she went to see her; but although, dismayed at sight of her suffering face, she did not utter one unkind word, her visit was so plainly injurious in its effects, that it was long before Mary would consent to a repetition of it.

Letty's recovery was very slow. The spring was close at hand before the bloom began to reappear—and then it was but fitfully—in Letty's cheek. Neither her gaiety, nor her usual excess of timorousness returned. A certain sad seriousness had taken the place of both, and she seemed to look out from deeper eyes. I cannot think that Letty had begun to perceive that there actually is a Nature shaping us to its own ends; but I think she had begun to feel that Mary lived in the conscious presence of such a power. To Tom she behaved very sweetly, but more like a tender sister than a lover, and Mary began to doubt whether her heart was altogether Tom's. From mention of approaching marriage, she turned with a nervous, uneasy haste. Had the insight which the enforced calmness of suffering sometimes brings, opened

her eyes to anything in Tom? The doubt filled Mary with anxiety. She thought and thought, until—delicate matter as it was to meddle with, and small encouragement as Godfrey Wardour had given her to expect sympathy—she yet made up her mind to speak to him on the subject—and the rather, that she was troubled at the unworthiness of his behaviour to Letty: gladly would she have him treat her with the generosity essential to the idea she had formed of him.

She went, therefore, one Sunday evening, to Thornwick, and requested to see Mr. Wardour.

It was plainly an unwilling interview he granted her, but she was not thereby deterred from opening her mind to him.

"I fear, Mr. Wardour," she said, "—I come altogether without authority—but I fear Letty has been rather hurried in her engagement with Mr. Helmer. I think she dreads being married—at least so soon."

"You would have her break it off?" said Godfrey, with cold restraint.

"No; certainly not," replied Mary; "that would be unjust to Mr. Helmer. But the thing was so hastened, indeed, hurried, by that unhappy accident, that she had scarcely time to know her own mind."

"Miss Marston," answered Godfrey severely, "it is her own fault—all and entirely her own fault."

"But surely," said Mary, "it will not do for us to insist upon desert. That is not how we are treated ourselves."

"It is not?" returned Godfrey angrily. "My experience is different. I am sure my faults have come back upon me pretty sharply.—She *must* marry the fellow, or her character is gone."

"I am unwilling to grant that, Mr. Wardour. It was

wrong in her to have anything to say to Mr. Helmer without your knowledge, and a foolish thing to meet him as she did; but Letty is a good girl, and you know country ways are old-fashioned, and in itself there is nothing wicked in having a talk with a young man after dark."

"You speak, I dare say, as such things are regarded in—certain strata of society," returned Godfrey, coldly; "but such views do not hold in that to which either of them belongs."

"It seems to me a pity they should not then," said Mary. "I know nothing of such matters, but surely young people should have opportunities of understanding each other. Anyhow, marriage is a heavy penalty to pay for such an indiscretion. A girl might like a young man well enough to enjoy a talk with him now and then, and yet find it hard to marry him."

"Did you come here to dispute social customs with me, Miss Marston?" said Godfrey. "I am not prepared, nor indeed sufficiently interested, to discuss them with you."

"I will come to the point at once," answered Mary; who, although speaking so collectedly, was much frightened at her own boldness: Godfrey seemed from his knowledge so far above her, and she owed him so much. "— Would it not be possible for Letty to return here? Then the thing might take its natural course, and Tom and she know each other better before they did what was irrevocable. They are little better than children now."

"The thing is absolutely impossible," said Godfrey and haughtily rose from his chair, like one in authority ending an interview. "But," he added, "you have been put to great expense for the foolish girl, and when she leaves you, I desire you will let me know—"

"Thank you, Mr. Wardour!" said Mary, who had risen also. "As you have now given a turn to the conversation

which is not in the least interesting to me, I wish you a good evening."

With the words, she left the room. He had made her angry at last. She trembled so, that the instant she was out of sight of the house, she had to sit down for dread of falling.

Godfrey remained in the room where she left him, full of indignation. Ever since that frightful waking, he had brooded over the injury—the insult, he counted it—which Letty had heaped upon him. A great tenderness towards her, to himself unknown, and of his own will unbegotten, remained in his spirit. When he passed the door of her room, returning from that terrible ride, he locked it, and put the key in his pocket, and from that day no one entered the chamber. But had he loved Letty as purely as he had loved her selfishly, he would have listened to Mary pleading in her behalf, and would have thought first about her well-being, not about her character in the eyes of the world. He would have seen also that, while the breath of the world's opinion is a mockery in counterpoise with a life of broken interest, and the society of an unworthy husband, the mere fact of his mother's receiving her again at Thornwick, would of itself be enough to re-establish her position in the face of all gainsayers. But in Godfrey Wardour love and pride went hand in hand. Not for a moment would he will to love a girl capable of being interested, if nothing more, in Tom Helmer. It must be allowed, however, that it would have been a terrible torture to see Letty about the place, to pass her on the stair, to come upon her in the garden, to sit with her in the room, and know all the time that it was the test of Tom's worth and her constancy. Even were she to give up Tom, satisfied that she did not love him, she could be nothing more to him,

even in the relation in which he had allowed her to think she stood to him. She had behaved too deceitfully, too heartlessly, too ungratefully, too *vulgarly* for that! Yet was his heart torn every time the vision of the gentle girl rose before "that inward eye," which, for long, could no more be to him "the bliss of solitude;" when he saw those hazel depths looking half anxious, half sorrowful in his face, as, with sadly comic sense of her stupidity, she listened while he explained or read something he loved. But no; nothing else would do than act the mere honest guardian, compelling them to marry, no matter how slight or transient the shadow the man had cast over her reputation!

Mary returned with a sense of utter failure.

But before long she came to the conclusion that all was right between Tom and Letty, and that the cause of her anxiety had lain merely in Letty's loss of animal spirits.

Now and then Mary tried to turn Tom's attention a little towards the duty of religion: Tom received the attempt with gentle amusement and a little *badinage*. It was all very well for girls! Indeed, he had made the observation that girls who had no religion, were "strong-minded," and that he could not endure! Like most men, he was so well satisfied with himself, that he saw no occasion to take trouble to be anything better than he was. Never suspecting what a noble creature he was meant to be, he never saw what a poor creature he was. In his own eyes he was a man any girl might be proud to marry. He had not yet however sunk to the depth of those who, having caught a glimpse of nobility, confess wretchedness, excuse it, and decline to allow that the noble they see they are bound to be; or, worse still perhaps, admit the obligation, but move no inch to fulfil it. It seems to

me that such must one day make acquaintance with *essential* misery—a thing of which they have no conception.

Day after day Tom passed through Turnbull and Marston's shop to see Letty. Tom cared for nobody, else he would have gone in by the kitchen-door, which was the only other entrance to the house; but I do not know whether it was a pity or not that he did not hear the remarks which rose like the dust of his passage behind him. In the same little sitting-room, where for so many years Mary had listened to the slow tender wisdom of her father, a clever young man was now making love to an ignorant girl, whom he did not half understand, or half appreciate, all the time he feeling himself the greater and wiser and more valuable of the two. He was unaware, however, that he did feel so, for he had never yet become conscious of any *fact* concerning himself.

The whole Turnbull family, from the beginnings of things self-constituted judges of the two Marstons, were not the less critical of the daughter, that the father had been taken from her. There was grumbling in the shop every time she ran up to see Letty, every one regarding her and speaking of her as a servant neglecting her duty. Yet all knew well enough that she was co-proprietor of business and stock, and the elder Turnbull knew besides that, if the lawyer to whose care William Marston had committed his daughter, were at that moment to go into the affairs of the partnership, he would find that Mary had a much larger amount of money actually in the business than he.

Of all matters connected with the business, except those of her own department, Mary was ignorant. Her father had never neglected his duty, but he had so far neglected what the world calls a man's interests, as to leave his affairs much too exclusively in the hands of his partner:

he had been too much interested in life itself, to look sharply after anything less than life. He acknowledged no *worldly* interests at all: either God cared for his interests, or he himself did not. Whether he might not have been more attentive to the state of his affairs without danger of deeper loss, I do not care to examine or determine: the result of his life in the world was a grand success. Now Mary's feeling and judgment in regard to *things* being identical with her father's, Turnbull, instructed by his greed, both natural and acquired, argued thus — unconsciously almost, but not the less argued—that what Mary valued so little, and he valued so much, must, by necessary deduction, be more his than hers—and *logically* ought to be *legally*. So servants begin to steal, arguing that such and such things are only lying about, and nobody cares for them.

But Turnbull, knowing that, notwithstanding the reason on his side, it was not safe to act on such a conclusion, had for some time felt no little anxiety to secure himself from investigation and possible disaster, by the marriage of Mary to his son George.

Tom Helmer had now to learn that, by his father's will, made doubtless under the influence of his mother, he was to have but a small annuity so long as she lived. Upon this he determined nevertheless to marry, confident in his literary faculty, which, he never doubted, would soon raise it to a very sufficient income. Nor did Mary attempt to dissuade him; for what could be better for a disposition like his, than care for the things of this life, occasioned by the needs of others dependent upon him! Besides, there seemed to be nothing else now possible for Letty. So, in the early summer, they were married, no relative present except Mrs. Wardour, Mrs. Helmer and Godfrey having both declined their invitation; and

no friend, except Mary for bridesmaid, and Mr. Pycroft, a school and college friend of Tom's, who was now making a bohemian livelihood in London by writing for the weekly press, as he called certain journals of no high standing, for groom's man. After the ceremony, and a breakfast provided by Mary, the young couple took the train for London.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### MARY IN THE SHOP.

More than a year had now passed from the opening of my narrative. It was full summer again at Testbridge, and things, to the careless eye, were unchanged, and, to the careless mind, would never change, although in fact nothing was the same, and nothing could continue as it now was. For were not the earth and the sun a little colder? Had not the moon crumbled a little? And had not the eternal warmth, unperceived save of a few, drawn a little nearer—the clock that measures the eternal day ticked one tick more to the hour when the Son of Man will come? But the greed and the fawning did go on unchanged, save it were for the worse, in the shop of Turnbull and Marston, seasoned only with the heavenly salt of Mary's good ministration.

She was very lonely. Letty was gone; and the link between Mr. Wardour and her not only broken, but a gulf of separation in its place. Not the less remained the good he had given her. No good is ever lost. The heavenly porter was departed, but had left the door wide. She had seen him but once since Letty's marriage, and then his salutation was like that of a dead man in

a dream; for in his sore heart he still imagined her the confidante of Letty's deception.

But the shadow of her father's absence swallowed all the other shadows. The air of warmth and peace and conscious safety which had hitherto surrounded her, was gone, and in its place cold, exposure, and annoyance. Between them her father and she had originated a mutually protective atmosphere of love; when that failed, the atmosphere of earthly relation rushed in, and enveloped her. The moment of her father's departure, malign influences, inimical to the very springs of her life, concentrated themselves upon her; it was the design of John Turnbull that she should not be comfortable so long as she did not irrevocably cast in her lot with his family; and the rest in the shop being mostly creatures of his own choice, by a sort of implicit understanding they proceeded to make her uncomfortable. So long as they confined themselves to silence, neglect, and general exclusion, Mary heeded little their behaviour, for no intercourse with them, beyond that of external good offices, could be better than indifferent to her; but when they advanced to positive interference, her position became indeed hard to endure. They would, for instance, keep watch on her serving, and as soon as the customer was gone, would find open fault with this or that she had said or done. But even this was comparatively endurable: when they advanced to the insolence of doing the same in the presence of the customer, she found it more than she could bear with even a show of equanimity. She did her best, however; and for some time things went on without any symptom of approaching crisis. But it was impossible this should continue; for had she been capable of endless endurance, her persecutors would only have gone on to worse. But Mary was naturally quick-

tempered, and the chief trouble they caused her was the control of her temper; for, although she had early come to recognize the imperative duty of this branch of self-government, she was not yet perfect in it. Not every one who can serve unboundedly can endure patiently; and the more gentle some natures, the more they resent the rudeness which springs from an opposite nature: absolutely courteous, they flame at discourtesy, and thus lack of the perfection to which patience would and must raise them. When Turnbull, in the narrow space behind the counter, would push his way past her without other pretence of apology than something like a sneer, she did feel for a moment as if evil were about to have the victory over her; and when Mrs. Turnbull came in, which happily was but seldom, she felt as if, from some sepulchre in her mind, a very demon sprang to meet her. For she behaved to her worst of all. She would heave herself in with the air and look of a vulgar duchess; for, from the height of her small consciousness, she looked down upon the shop, and never entered it save as a customer. The daughter of a small country attorney, who, notwithstanding his unneglected opportunities, had not been too successful to accept as a husband for his daughter such a tradesman as John Turnbull, she arrogated position from her idea of her father's position; and, while bitterly cherishing the feeling that she had married beneath her, obstinately excluded the fact that therein she had descended to her husband's level, regarding herself much in the light of a princess whose disguise takes nothing from her rank. She was like those ladies who, having set their seal to the death of their first husbands by marrying again, yet cling to the title they gave them, and continue to call themselves by their name.

Mrs. Turnbull never bought a dress at the shop. No

one should say of her, it was easy for a snail to live in a castle! She took pains to let her precious public know that she went to London to make her purchases. If she did not mention also, that she made them at the warehouses where her husband was a customer, procuring them at the same price he would have paid, it was because she saw no occasion. It was indeed only for some small occasional necessity she ever crossed the threshold of the place whence came all the money she had to spend. When she did, she entered it with such airs as she imagined to represent the consciousness of the scion of a county-family: there is one show of breeding vulgarity seldom assumes—simplicity. No sign of recognition would pass between her husband and herself: by one stern refusal to acknowledge his advances, she had from the first taught him that in the shop they were strangers: he saw the rock of ridicule ahead, and required no second lesson: when she was present, he never knew it. George had learned the lesson before he went into the business, and Mary had never required it. The others behaved to her as to any customer known to stand upon her dignity, but she made them no return in politeness; and the way she would order Mary, now there was no father to offend, would have been amusing enough but for the irritation its extreme rudeness caused her. She did, however, manage sometimes to be at once both a little angry and much amused. Small idea had Mrs. Turnbull of the diversion which on such occasions she afforded the customers present.

One day, a short time before her marriage, delayed by the illness of Mr. Redmain, Miss Mortimer happened to be in the shop, and was being served by Mary, when Mrs. Turnbull entered. Careless of the customer, she walked straight up to her as if she saw none, and in a

tone that would be dignified, and was haughty, desired her to bring her a reel of marking-cotton. Now it had been a principle with Mary's father, and she had thoroughly learned it, that whatever would be counted a rudeness by *any* customer, must be shown to *none*. "If all are equal in the sight of God," he would say, "how dare I leave a poor woman to serve a rich? Would I leave one countess to serve another? My business is to sell in the name of Christ. To respect persons in the shop, would be just the same as to do it in the chapel, and would be to deny him."

"Excuse me, ma'am," said Mary, "I am waiting on Miss Mortimer," and went on with what she was about. Mrs. Turnbull flounced away, a little abashed, not by Mary, but by finding who the customer was, and carried her commands across the shop. After a moment or two, however, imagining, in the blindness of her surging anger, that Miss Mortimer was gone, whereas she had only moved a little farther on to look at something, she walked up to Mary in a fury.

"Miss Marston," she said, her voice half choked with rage, "I am at a loss to understand what you mean by your impertinence."

"I am sorry you should think me impertinent," answered Mary. "You saw yourself I was engaged with a customer, and could not attend to you."

"Your tone was insufferable, miss!" cried the grand lady; but what more she would have said I cannot tell, for just then Miss Mortimer resumed her place in front of Mary. She had no idea of her position in the shop, neither suspected who her assailant was, and fearing the woman's accusation might do her an injury, felt compelled to interfere.

"Miss Marston," she said—she had just heard Mrs.

Turnbull use her name, "if you should be called to account by your employer, will you, please, refer to me. You were perfectly civil both to me and to this—" she hesitated a perceptible moment, but ended with the word "*lady*," peculiarly toned.

"Thank you, ma'am," said Mary with a smile, "but it is of no consequence."

This answer would have almost driven the woman out of her reason—already, between annoyance with herself and anger with Mary, her hue was purple: something she called her constitution required a nightly glass of brandy and water—but she was so dumfounded by Miss Mortimer's defence of Mary, which she looked upon as an assault on herself, so painfully aware that all hands were arrested, and all eyes fixed on herself, and so mortified with the conviction that her husband was enjoying her discomfiture, that, with what haughtiness she could extemporize from consuming offence, she made a sudden vortical gyration, and walked from the vile place.

Now George never lost a chance of recommending himself to Mary by siding with her—but only after the battle. He came up to her now with a mean unpleasant look, intended to represent sympathy, and, approaching his face to hers, said confidentially,—

"What made my mother speak to you like that, Mary?"

"You must ask herself," she answered.

"There you are, as usual, Mary!" he protested; "you will never let a fellow take your part!"

"If you wanted to take my part, you should have done so when there would have been some good in it."

"How could I, before Miss Mortimer, you know!"

"Then why do it now?"

"Well, you see—it's hard to bear hearing you ill

used! What did you say to Miss Mortimer that angered my mother?"

His father heard him, and taking the cue, called out in the rudest fashion,—

"If you think, Mary, you're going to take liberties with customers because you've got no one over you, the sooner you find you're mistaken the better."

Mary made him no answer.

On her way to "the villa" Mrs. Turnbull, spurred by spite, had got hold of the same idea as George, only that she invented where he had but imagined it; and when her husband came home in the evening fell out upon him for allowing Mary to be impertinent to his customers, in whom for the first time she condescended to show an interest:—

"There she was, talking away to that Miss Mortimer as if she was Beenie in the kitchen! County-people won't stand being treated as if one was just as good as another, I can tell you! She'll be the ruin of the business, with her fine-lady-airs. Who's *she*, I should like to know!"

"I shall speak to her," said the husband. "But," he went on, "I fear you will no longer approve of marrying her to George, if you think she's an injury to the business!"

"You know as well as I do, that is the readiest way to get her out of it. Make her marry George, and she will fall into my hands. If I don't make her repent her impudence then, you may call me the fool you think me."

Mary knew well enough what they wanted of her; but of the real cause at the root of their desire she had no suspicion. Recoiling altogether from Mr. Turnbull's theories of business, which were in flat repudiation of the laws of him who alone understands either man or

his business, she yet had not a doubt of his honesty as the trades and professions count honesty. Her father had left the money affairs of the firm to Mr. Turnbull, and she did the same. It was for no other reason than that her position had become almost intolerable, that she now began to wonder if she was bound to this mode of life, and whether it might not be possible to forsake it.

Greed is the soul's thieving; where there is greed there cannot be honesty. John Turnbull, it is true, was not only proud of his reputation for honesty, but prided himself on being an honest man; yet not the less was he dishonest—and that with a dishonesty such as few of those called thieves have attained to.

Like most of his kind, he had been neither so vulgar nor so dishonest from the first. In the prime of youth he had had what the people about him called high notions, and counted quixotic fancies. But it was not their mockery of his tall talk that turned him aside; opposition invariably confirmed Turnbull. He had never set his face in the right direction. The seducing influence lay in himself. It was not the truth he had loved; it was the show of fine sentiment he had enjoyed. The distinction of holding loftier opinions than his neighbours was the ground of his advocacy of them. Something of the beauty of the truth he must have seen—who does not?—else he could not have been thus moved at all; but he had never denied himself even a whim for the carrying out of one of his ideas; he had never set himself to be better; and the whole mountain-chain, therefore, of his notions sank and sank, until at length their loftiest peak was the maxim, *Honesty is the best policy*—a maxim which, true enough in fact, will no more make a man honest, than the economic aphorism, *The supply equals the demand*, will teach him the niceties of social

duty. Whoever makes policy the ground of his honesty will discover more and more exceptions to the rule. The career, therefore, of Turnbull of the high notions, had been a gradual descent to the level of his present dishonesty and vulgarity: nothing is so vulgarizing as dishonesty. I do not care to follow the history of any man downward. Let him who desires to look on such a panorama, faithfully and thoroughly depicted, read Auerbach's *Diethelm von Buchenberg*.

Things went a little more quietly in the shop after this for a while: Turnbull probably was afraid of precipitating matters, and driving Mary to seek counsel—from which much injury might arise to his condition and prospects. As if to make amends for past rudeness, he even took some pains to be polite, putting on something of the manners with which he favoured his best "customers," of all mankind in his eyes the most to be honoured. This of course rendered him odious in the eyes of Mary, and ripened the desire to free herself from circumstances which from garments seemed to have grown cerements. She was, however, too much her father's daughter to do anything in haste.

She might have been less willing to abandon them, had she had any friends likeminded with herself, but while they were all kindly disposed to her, none of the religious associates of her father, who knew, or might have known her well, approved of her. They spoke of her generally with a shake of the head, and an unquestioned feeling that God was not pleased with her. There are few of the so-called religious who seem able to trust either God or their neighbour in matters that concern those two and no other. Nor had she had opportunity of making acquaintance with any who believed and lived like her father, in other of the Christian com-

munities of the town. But she had her Bible, and when that troubled her, as it did not a little sometimes, she had the Eternal Wisdom to cry to for such wisdom as she could receive; and one of the things she learned was, that nowhere in the Bible was she called on to believe in the Bible, but in the living God, in whom is no darkness, and who alone can give light to understand his own intent. All her troubles she carried to him.

It was not always the solitude of her room that Mary sought, to get out of the wind of the world. Her love of nature had been growing stronger, notably, from her father's death. If the world is God's, every true man ought to feel at home in it. Something is wrong if the calm of the summer night does not sink into the heart, for the peace of God is there embodied. Something is wrong in the man to whom the sunrise is not a divine glory, for therein are embodied the truth, the simplicity, the might of the Maker. When all is true in us, we shall feel the visible presence of the Watchful and Loving; for the thing that he works is its sign and symbol, its clothing fact. In the gentle conference of earth and sky, in the witnessing colours of the west, in the wind that so gently visited her cheek, in the great burst of a new morning, Mary saw the sordid affairs of Mammon, to whose worship the shop seemed to become more and more of a temple, sink to the bottom of things, as the mud, which, during the day, the feet of the drinking cattle have stirred, sinks in the silent night to the bottom of the clear pool; and she saw that the sordid is all in the soul, and not in the shop. The service of Christ is help. The service of Mammon is greed.

Letty was no good correspondent; after one letter in which she declared herself perfectly happy, and another in which she said almost nothing, her communication

ceased. Mrs. Wardour had been in the shop again and again, but on each occasion had sought the service of another; and once indeed when Mary alone was disengaged, had waited until another was at liberty. While Letty was in her house she had been civil, but as soon as she was gone, seemed to show that she held her concerned in the scandal that had befallen Thornwick. Once, as I have said, she met Godfrey. It was in the fields. He was walking hurriedly as usual, but with his head bent, and a gloomy gaze fixed upon nothing visible. He started when he saw her, took his hat off, and, with his eyes seeming to look far away beyond her, passed without a word. Yet had she been to him a true pupil; for although neither of them knew it, Mary had learned more from Godfrey than Godfrey was capable of teaching. She had turned thought and feeling into life, into reality, into creation. They speak of the *creations* of the human intellect, of the human imagination! there is nothing man can do comes half so near the making of the Maker as the ordering of his way—except one thing; the highest creation of which man is capable, is to will the will of the Father. That *has* in it an element of the purely creative, and then is man likest God. But simply to do what we ought, is an altogether higher, diviner, more creative thing, than to write the grandest poem, paint the most beautiful picture, carve the mightiest statue, build the most worshipping temple, dream out the most enchanting commotion of melody and harmony. If Godfrey could have seen the soul of the maiden into whose face his discourtesy called the hot blood, he would have beheld there simply what God made the earth for; as it was, he saw a shop-girl, to whom in happier circumstances he had shown kindness, in whom he was now no longer interested. But the sight of his troubled

face called up all the mother in her; a rush of tenderness, born of gratitude, flooded her heart. He was sad, and she could do nothing to comfort him! He had been royally good to her, and no return was in her power. She could not even let him know how she had profited by his gifts! She could come near him with no ministration! The bond between them was an eternal one, yet were they separated by a gulf of unrelation. Not a mountain range, but a stayless nothingness parted them. She built many a castle, with walls of gratitude and floors of service to entertain Godfrey Wardour; but they stood on no foundation of imagined possibility.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE WEDDING DRESS.

For all her troubles, however, Mary had her pleasures, even in the shop. It was a delight to receive the friendly greetings of such as had known and honoured her father. She had the pleasure, as real as it was simple, of pure service, reaping the fruit of the earth in the joy of the work that was given her to do; there is no true work that does not carry its reward, though there are few that do not drop it and lose it. She gathered also the pleasure of seeing and talking with people whose manners and speech were of finer grain and tone than those about her. When Hesper Mortimer entered the shop, she brought with her delight; her carriage was like the gait of an ode; her motions were rhythm; and her speech was music. Her smile was light, and her whole presence an enchantment to Mary. The reading aloud which Wardour had led her to practise had taught her much, not only in respect of the delicacies of speech and utterance, but in the deeper matters of motion, relation, and harmony. Hesper's clear-cut, but not too sharply defined consonants; her soft, but full-bodied vowels; above all her slow cadences that hovered on the verge of song, as her walk on the verge of a slow aerial dance;—the carriage of her head, the movements of her lips, her arms, her hands; the self-possession that seemed the very embodiment of law;—these formed together a whole of inexpressible delight, inextricably for Mary associated with

music and verse: she would hasten to serve her as if she had been an angel come to do a little earthly shopping, and return with the next heavenward tide. Hesper, in response all but unconscious, would be waited on by no other than Mary; and always between them passed some sweet, gentle nothings, which afforded Hesper more pleasure than she could have accounted for.

Her wedding-day was now for the third time fixed, when one morning she entered the shop to make some purchases. Not happy in the prospect before her, she was yet inclined to make the best of it so far as clothes were concerned—the more so, perhaps, that she had seldom yet been dressed to her satisfaction: she was now brooding over a certain idea for her wedding-dress, which she had altogether failed in the attempt to convey to her London *couturière;* and it had come into her head to try whether Mary might not grasp her idea, and help her to make it intelligible.

Mary listened and thought, questioned, and desired explanations—at length begged she would allow her to ponder the thing a little: she could hardly at once venture to say anything. Hesper laughed, and said she was taking a small matter too seriously—concluding from Mary's hesitation that she had but perplexed her, and that she could be of no use to her in the difficulty.

"A small matter? Your wedding-dress!" exclaimed Mary, in a tone of expostulation.

Hesper did not laugh again, but gave a little sigh instead, which struck sadly on Mary's sympathetic heart. She cast a quick look in her face. Hesper caught the look, and understood it. For one passing moment she felt as if, amidst the poor pleasure of adorning herself for a hated marriage, she had found a precious thing of which she had once or twice dreamed, never thought as

a possible existence—a friend, namely, to love her: the next, she saw the absurdity of imagining a friend in a shop-girl.

"But I must make up my mind so soon!" she answered. "Madame Crepine gave me her idea, in answer to mine, but nothing like it, two days ago; and, as I have not written again, I fear she may be taking her own way with the thing. I am certain to hate it."

"I will talk to you about it as early as you please to-morrow, if that will do," returned Mary.

She knew nothing about dressmaking beyond what came of a true taste, and the experience gained in cutting out and making her own garments, which she had never yet found a dressmaker to do to her mind; and indeed Hesper had been led to ask her advice mainly from observing how neat the design of her dresses was, and how faithfully they fitted her. Dress is a sort of freemasonry between girls.

"But I cannot have the horses to-morrow," said Hesper.

"I might," pondered Mary aloud, after a moment's silence, "walk out to Durnmelling this evening after the shop is shut. By that time I shall have been able to think; I find it impossible, with you before me."

Hesper acknowledged the compliment with a very pleasant smile. If it be true, as I may not doubt, that women, in dressing, have the fear of women and not of men before their eyes, then a compliment from some women must be more acceptable to some, than a compliment from any man but the specially favoured.

"Thank you a thousand times," she drawled sweetly. "Then I shall expect you. Ask for my maid. She will take you to my room. Good-bye for the present."

As soon as she was gone, Mary, her mind's eye full of her figure, her look, her style, her motion, gave herself

to the important question of the dress conceived by Hesper; and during her dinner-hour contrived to cut out and fit to her own person the pattern of a garment such as she supposed intended in the not very lucid description she had given her. When she was free, she set out with it for Durnmelling.

It was rather a long walk, the earlier part of it full of sad reminders of the pleasure with which, greater than ever accompanied her to church, she went to pay her Sunday visit at Thornwick; but the latter part, although the places were so near, almost new to her: she had never been within the gate of Durnmelling, and felt curious to see the house of which she had so often heard.

The butler opened the door to her—an elderly man, of conscious dignity rather than pride, who received the "young person" graciously, and leaving her in the entrance-hall, went to find "Miss Mortimer's maid," he said, though there was but one lady's-maid in the establishment.

The few moments she had to wait far more than repaid her for the trouble she had taken: through a side-door she looked into the great roofless hall, the one grand thing about the house. Its majesty laid hold upon her, and the shopkeeper's daughter felt the power of the ancient dignity and ineffaceable beauty, far more than any of the family to which it had for centuries belonged.

She was standing lost in delight, when a rude voice called to her from halfway up a stair,—

"You're to come this way, miss."

With a start, she turned and went.

It was a large room to which she was led. There was no one in it, and she walked to an open window,

which had a wide outlook across the fields. A little to the right, over some trees, were the chimneys of Thornwick. She almost started to see them—so near, and yet so far—like the memory of a sweet, sad story.

"Do you like my prospect?" asked the voice of Hesper behind her. "It is flat."

"I like it much, Miss Mortimer," answered Mary, turning quickly with a bright face. "Flatness has its own beauty. I sometimes feel as if room was all I wanted; and of that there is so much there! You see over the tree-tops too, and that is good—sometimes—don't you think?"

Miss Mortimer gave no other reply than a gentle stare, which expressed no curiosity, although she had a vague feeling that Mary's words meant something. Most girls of her class would hardly have got so far.

The summer was backward, but the day had been fine and warm, and the evening was dewy and soft, and full of evasive odour. The window looked westward, and the setting sun threw long shadows towards the house. A gentle wind was moving in the tree-tops. The spirit of the evening had laid hold of Mary. The peace of faithfulness filled the air. The day's business vanished, molten in the rest of the coming night. Even Hesper's wedding-dress was gone from her thoughts. She was in her own world, and ready, for very quietness of spirit, to go to sleep. But she had not forgotten the delight of Hesper's presence; it was only that all relation between them was gone except such as was purely human.

"This reminds me so of some beautiful verses of Henry Vaughan!" she said, half-dreamily.

"What do they say?" drawled Hesper.

Mary repeated as follows:—

"The frosts are past, the storms are gone,
And backward life at last comes on.
And here in dust and dirt, O here,
The Lilies of his love appear!"

"Whose did you say the lines were?" asked Hesper, with merest automatic response.

"Henry Vaughan's," answered Mary, with a little spiritual shiver, as of one who had dropt a pearl in the miry way.

"I never heard of him," rejoined Hesper, with entire indifference.

For anything she knew, he might be an occasional writer in *The Belgrave Magazine*, or *The Fireside Herald*. Ignorance is one of the many things of which a lady of position is never ashamed; wherein she is, it may be, more right than most of my readers will be inclined to allow; for ignorance is not the thing to be ashamed of, but neglect of knowledge. That a young person in Mary's position should know a certain thing, was, on the other hand, a reason why a lady in Hesper's position should not know it! Was it possible a shop-girl should know anything that Hesper ought to know and did not? It was foolish of Mary, perhaps, but she had vaguely felt that a beautiful lady like Miss Mortimer, and with such a name as Hesper, must know all the lovely things she knew, and many more besides.

"He lived in the time of the Charleses," she said, with a tremble in her voice, for she was ashamed to show her knowledge against the other's ignorance.

"Ah!" drawled Hesper, with a confused feeling that people who kept shops read stupid old books that lay about, because they could not subscribe to a circulating library.—"Are you fond of poetry?" she added; for the slight shadowy shyness into which her venture had thrown

Mary, drew her heart a little, though she hardly knew it, and inclined her to say something.

"Yes," answered Mary, who felt like a child questioned by a stranger in the road; "—when it is good," she added hesitatingly.

"What do you mean by good?" asked Hesper—out of her knowledge, Mary thought, but it was not even out of her ignorance, only out of her indifference. People must say something lest life should stop.

"That is a question difficult to answer," replied Mary. "I have often asked it of myself, but never got any plain answer."

"I do not see why you should find any difficulty in it," returned Hesper, with a shadow of interest. "You know what you mean when you say to yourself you like this, or you do not like that."

"How clever she is too!" thought Mary; but she answered, "I don't think I ever say anything to myself about the poetry I read—not at the time, I mean. If I like it, it drowns me; and if I don't like it, it is as the Dead Sea to me, in which you know you can't sink, if you try ever so."

Hesper saw nothing in the words, and began to fear that Mary was so stupid as to imagine herself clever; whereupon the fancy she had taken to her began to sink like water in sand. The two were still on their feet, near the window, Mary, in her bonnet, with her back to it, and Hesper, in evening attire, with her face to the sunset, so that the one was like a darkling worshipper, the other like the radiant goddess. But the truth was, that Hesper was a mere earthly woman, and Mary a heavenly messenger to her. Neither of them knew it, but so it was; for the angels are essentially humble, and

Hesper would have condescended to any angel out of her own class.

"I think I know good poetry by what it does to me," resumed Mary thoughtfully, just as Hesper was about to pass to the business of the hour.

"Indeed!" rejoined Hesper, not less puzzled than before, if the word should be used where there was no effort to understand. Poetry had never done anything to her, and Mary's words conveyed no shadow of an idea.

The tone of her *Indeed* checked Mary. She hesitated a moment, but went on.

"Sometimes," she said, "it makes me feel as if my heart were too big for my body; sometimes as if all the grand things in heaven and earth were trying to get into me at once; sometimes as if I had discovered something nobody else knew; sometimes as if—no, not *as if*, for then I *must* go and pray to God. But I am trying to tell you what I don't know how to tell. I am not talking nonsense, I hope, only ashamed of myself that I can't talk sense.—I will show you what I have been doing about your dress."

Far more to Hesper's surprise and admiration than any of her half-foiled attempts at the utterance of her thoughts, Mary, taking from her pocket the shape she had prepared, put it on herself, and slowly revolving before Hesper, revealed what in her eyes was a master-piece.

"But how clever of you!" she cried.—Her own fingers had not been quite innocent of the labour of the needle, for money had long been scarce at Durnmelling, and in the paper shape she recognized the hand of an artist.—"Why," she continued, "you are nothing less than an accomplished dressmaker!"

"That I dare not think myself," returned Mary, "seeing I never had a lesson."

"I wish you would make my wedding-dress," said Hesper.

"I could not venture, even if I had the time," answered Mary. "The moment I began to cut into the stuff, I should be terrified, and lose my self-possession. I never made a dress for anybody but myself."

"You are a little witch!" said Hesper; while Mary, who had roughly prepared a larger shape, proceeded to fit it to her person.

She was busy pinning and unpinning, shifting and pinning again, when suddenly Hesper said,—

"I suppose you know I am going to marry money?"

"Oh! don't say that. It's too dreadful!" cried Mary, stopping her work, and looking up in Hesper's face.

"What! you supposed I was going to marry a man like Mr. Redmain for love?" rejoined Hesper, with a hard laugh.

"I cannot bear to think of it!" said Mary. "But you do not really mean it! You are only—making fun of me! Do say you are."

"Indeed I am not. I wish I could say I was! It is very horrid, I know, but where's the good of mincing matters? If I did not call the thing by its name, the thing would be just the same. You know people in our world have to do as they must; they can't pick and choose like you happy creatures. I daresay, now, you are engaged to a young man you love with all your heart, one you would rather marry than any other in the whole universe."

"Oh dear no!" returned Mary, with a smile most plainly fancy-free. "I am not engaged, nor in the least likely to be."

"And not in love either?" said Hesper—with such coolness that Mary looked up in her face to know if she had really said so.

"No," she replied.

"No more am I," echoed Hesper; "that is the one good thing in the business: I shan't break my heart, as some girls do. At least, so they say—I don't believe it: how could a girl be so indecent? It is bad enough to marry a man: that one can't avoid; but to die of a broken heart is to be a traitor to your sex. As if women couldn't live without men!"

Mary smiled, and was silent. She had read a good deal, and thought she understood such things better than Miss Mortimer. But she caught herself smiling, and felt as if she had sinned. For that a young woman should speak of love and marriage as Miss Mortimer did, was too horrible to be understood — and she had smiled! She would have been less shocked with Hesper, however, had she known that she forced an indifference she could not feel,—her last poor rampart of sand against the sea of horror rising around her. But from her heart she pitied her, almost as one of the lost.

"Don't fix your eyes like that," said Hesper angrily, "or I shall cry. Look the other way, and listen.—I am marrying money, I tell you—and for money; therefore I ought to get the good of it. Mr. Mortimer will be father enough to see to that! So I shall be able to do what I please. I have fallen in love with you; and why shouldn't I have you for my—"

She paused, hesitating: what was it she was about to propose to the little lady standing before her! She had been going to say *maid:* what was it that checked her? The feeling was to herself shapeless and nameless; but, however some of my readers may smile at the notion of

a girl who served behind a counter being a lady, and however ready Hesper Mortimer would have been to join them, it was yet a vague sense of the fact that was now embarrassing her, for she was not half lady enough to deal with it. In very truth, Mary Marston was already immeasurably more of a lady than Hesper Mortimer was ever likely to be in this world. What was the stateliness and pride of the one compared to the fact that the other would have died in the work-house or the street rather than let a man she did not love embrace her—yes, if all her ancestors in hell had required the sacrifice! To be a martyr to a lie is but false ladyhood. She only is a lady who witnesses to the truth, come of it what may.

"—for my—my companion, or something of the sort," concluded Hesper; "and then I should be sure of being always dressed to my mind."

"That *would* be nice!" responded Mary, thinking only of the kindness in the speech.

"Would you really like it?" asked Hesper, in her turn pleased.

"I should like it very much," replied Mary, not imagining the proposal had in it a shadow of seriousness. "I wish it were possible."

"Why not, then? Why shouldn't it be possible? I don't suppose you would mind using your needle a little?"

"Not in the least," answered Mary, amused. "Only what would they do in the shop without me?"

"They could get somebody else, couldn't they?"

"Hardly to take my place. My father was Mr. Turnbull's partner."

"Oh!" said Hesper, not much instructed. "I thought you had only to give warning!"

There the matter dropped, and Mary thought no more about it.

"You will let me keep this pattern?" said Hesper.

"It was made for you," answered Mary.

While Hesper was lazily thinking whether that meant she was to pay for it, Mary made her a pretty obeisance, and bade her good night. Hesper returned her adieu kindly, but neither shook hands with her, nor rang the bell to have her shown out. Mary found her own way, however, and presently was breathing the fresh air of the twilight fields, on her way home to her piano and her books.

For some time after she was gone, Hesper was entirely occupied with the excogitation of certain harmonies of the toilette, that must minister effect to the dress she had now so plainly before her mind's eye; but by and by the dress began to melt away, and like a dissolving view disappeared, leaving in its place the form of "that singular shop-girl." There was nothing striking about her; she made no such sharp impression on the mind as compelled one to think of her again; yet always, when one had been long enough in her company to feel the charm of her individuality, the very quiet of any quiet moment was enough to bring back the sweetness of Mary's twilight-presence. For this girl, who spent her days behind a counter, was one of the spiritual forces at work for the conservation and recovery of the universe.

Not only had Hesper Mortimer never had a friend worthy of the name, but no idea of pure friendship had as yet been generated in her. Sepia was the nearest to her intimacy: how far friendship could have place between two such I need not inquire; but in her fits of misery Hesper had no other to go to. Those fits, alas! grew less and less frequent; for Hesper was on the down-

ward incline; but when the next came, after this interview, she found herself haunted, at a little distance, as it were, by a strange sense of dumb invisible tending. It did not once come close to her; it did not once offer her the smallest positive consolation; the thing was only this, that the essence of Mary's being was so purely ministration, that her form could not recur to any memory without bringing with it a dreamy sense of help. Most powerful of all powers in its holy insinuation, is *being*. *To be* is more powerful than even *to do*. Action *may* be hypocrisy, but being is the thing itself, and is the parent of action. Had anything that Mary *said* recurred to Hesper, she would have thought of it only as the poor sentimentality of a low education.

But Hesper did not think of Mary's position as low; that would have been to measure it, and it did not once suggest itself as having any relation to any life in which she was interested. She saw no difference of level between Mary and the lawyer who came about her marriage settlements: they were together beyond her social horizon. In like manner moral differences—and that in her own class—were almost equally beyond recognition. If by neglect of its wings, an eagle should sink to a dodo, it would then recognize only the laws of dodo life. For the dodos of humanity, did not one believe in a consuming fire and an outer darkness, what would be left us but an ever renewed *alas!* It is truth and not imperturbability that a man's nature requires of him; it is help, not the leaving of cards at doors, that will be recognized as the test; it is love, and no amount of flattery that will prosper; differences wide as that between a gentleman and a cad, will contract to a hair's breadth in that day; the customs of the trade and the picking of pockets will go together, with the greater excuse for the greater need

and the less knowledge; liars the most gentleman-like and the most rowdy will go as liars; the first shall be last, and the last first.

Hesper's day drew on. She had many things to think about—things very different from any that concerned Mary Marston. She was married; found life in London somewhat absorbing; and forgot Mary.

# CHAPTER XXI.

## MR. REDMAIN.

A LIFE of comparatively innocent gaiety could not be attractive to Mr. Redmain, but at first he accompanied his wife everywhere. No one knew better than he that not an atom of love had mingled with her motives in marrying him; but for a time he seemed bent on showing her that she needed not have been so averse to him. Whether this was indeed his design or not, I imagine he enjoyed the admiration she roused; for why should not a man take pride in the possession of a fine woman as well as in that of a fine horse! To be sure, Mrs. Redmain was not quite in the same way, nor quite so much his, as his horses were, and might one day be a good deal less his than she was now; but in the meantime she was, I fancy, a pleasant break in the gathering monotony of his existence. As he got more accustomed to the sight of her in a crowd, however, and at the same time to her not very interesting company in private, when she took not the smallest pains to please him, he gradually lapsed into his former ways, and soon came to spend his evenings in company that made him forget his wife. He had loved her in a sort of a way, better left undefined, and had also, almost from the first, hated her a little; for, following her cousin's advice, she had appealed to him to save her, and when he evaded her prayer, had addressed him in certain terms too appropriate to be agreeable, and too forcible to be forgotten. His hatred, however, if that be not much too strong a

name, was neither virulent nor hot, for it had no inverted love to feed and embitter it. It was more a thing of his head than his heart, revealing itself mainly in short acrid speeches, meant to be clever, and indubitably disagreeable. Nor did Hesper prove an unworthy antagonist in their encounters of polite Billingsgate: what she lacked in experience she made up in breeding. The common remark, generally false, about no love being lost, was in their case true enough, for there never had been any between them to lose. The withered rose-leaves have their sweetness yet, but what of the rotted peony? It was generally when Redmain had been longer than usual without seeing his wife that he said the worst things to her, as if spite had grown in absence; but that he should then be capable of saying such things as he did say, could be understood only by those who knew the man and his history.

Ferdinand Goldberg Redmain—parents with mean surroundings often give grand names to their children—was the son of an intellectually gifted labourer, who, rising first to be boss of a gang, began to take portions of contracts, and arrived at last, through one lucky venture after another, at having his estimate accepted and the contract given him for a rather large affair. The result was that, through his minute knowledge of details, his faculty for getting work out of his labourers, a toughness of heart and will that enabled him to screw wages to the lowest mark, and the judicious employment of inferior material, the contract paid him much too well for any good to come out of it. From that time, what he called his life was a continuous course of what he called success, and he died one of the richest dirt-beetles of the age, bequeathing great wealth to his son, and leaving a reputation for substantial worth behind him; hardly leav-

ing it, I fancy, for surely he found it waiting him where he went. He had been guilty of a thousand meannesses, oppressions, rapacities, and some quiet rogueries, but none of them worse than those of many a man whose ultimate failure has been the sole cause of his excommunication by the society which all the time knew well enough what he was. Often had he been held up by would-be teachers as a pattern to aspiring youth of what might be achieved by unwavering attention to *the main chance*, combined with unassailable honesty: from his experience they would once more prove to a gaping world the truth of the maxim, the highest intelligible to a base soul, that "honesty is the best policy." With his money he left to his son the seeds of a varied meanness, which bore weeds enough, but curiously, neither avarice, nor, within the bounds of a modest prudence, any unwillingness to part with money—a fact which will probably appear the stranger when I have told the following anecdote concerning a brother of the father, of whom few indeed mentioned in my narrative ever heard.

This man was a joiner, or working cabinetmaker, or something of the sort. Having one day been set by his master to repair for an old lady an escritoire which had been in her possession for a long time, he came to her house in the evening with a five pound note of a country bank, which he had found in a secret drawer of the same, handing it to her with the remark, that he had always found honesty the best policy. She gave him half a sovereign, and he took his leave well satisfied. *He had been first to make inquiry, and had learned that the bank stopped payment many years ago.* I cannot help wondering, curious in the statistics of honesty, how many of my readers will be more amused than disgusted with the story.

It is a great thing to come of decent people, and Ferdinand Goldberg Redmain must not be judged like one who, of honourable parentage, whether noble or peasant, takes himself across to the shady side of the road. Much had been against Redmain. I do not know of what sort his mother was, but from certain embryonic virtues in him, which could hardly have been his father's, I should think she must have been better than her husband. She died, however, while he was a mere child; and his father married, some said did not *marry* again. The boy was sent to a certain public school, which at that time, whatever it may or may not be now, was simply a hotbed of the lowest vices, and in devil-matters Redmain was an apt pupil. There is fresh help for the world every time a youth starts clean upon manhood's race; his very being is a hope of cleansing: this one started as foul as youth could well be, and had not yet begun to repent. His character was well known to his associates, for he was no hypocrite, and Hesper's father knew it perfectly, and was therefore worse than he. Had Redmain had a daughter, he would never have given her to a man like himself. But then Mortimer was so poor, and Redmain was so *very* rich! Alas for the man who degrades his poverty by worshipping wealth: there is no abyss in hell too deep for him to find its bottom.

Mr. Redmain had no profession, and knew nothing of business beyond what was necessary for understanding whether his factor or steward, or whatever he called him, was doing well with his money:—to that he gave heed. Also, wiser than many, he took some little care not to spend at full speed what life he had. With this view he laid down and observed certain rules in the ordering of his pleasures, which enabled him to keep

ahead of the vice-constable for some time longer than would otherwise have been the case. But he is one who can never finally be outrun, and now, as Mr. Redmain was approaching the end of middle age, he heard plainly enough the approach of the wool-footed avenger behind him. Horrible was the inevitable to him, as horrible as to any; but it had not yet looked frightful enough to arrest his downward rush. In his better conditions—physical, I mean—whether he had any better moral conditions I cannot tell—he would laugh and say, "*Gather the roses while you may*"—heaven and earth! what roses! —but in his worse, he maledicted everything, and was horribly afraid of hell. When in tolerable health, he laughed at the notion of such an out-of-the-way place, repudiating its very existence, and, calling in all the arguments urged by good men against the idea of an eternity of aimless suffering, used them against the idea of any punishment after death. Himself a bad man, he reasoned that God was too good to punish sin; himself a proud man, he reasoned that God was too high to take heed of him. He forgot the best argument he could have adduced—namely, that the punishment he had had in this life had done him no good; from which he might have been glad to argue that none would, and therefore none would be tried. But I suppose his mother believed there was a hell, for at such times when from weariness he was less of an evil beast than usual, the old-fashioned horror would inevitably raise its deinosaurian head afresh above the slime of his consciousness; and then, even his wife, could she have seen how the soul of the man shuddered and recoiled, would have let his brutality pass unheeded, though it was then at its worst, his temper at such times being altogether furious. There was no grace in him when he was ill, nor at any time, beyond a certain

cold grace of manner, which he kept for ceremony, or where he wanted to please.

Happily, Mr. Redmain had one intellectual passion, which, poor thing as it was, and in its motive, most of its aspects, and almost all its tendencies, evil exceedingly, yet did something to delay that corruption of his being, which, at the same time, it powerfully aided to complete: it was for the understanding and analysis of human evil —not in the abstract, but alive and operative. For the appeasement of this passion, he must render intelligible to himself, and that on his own exclusive theory of human vileness, the aims and workings of every fresh specimen of what he called human nature that seemed bad enough, or was peculiar enough to interest him. In this region of darkness he ranged like a discoverer—prowled rather, like an unclean beast of prey—ever and always on the outlook for the false and foul; acknowledging, it is true, that he was no better himself, but arrogating on that ground a correctness of judgment beyond the reach of such as, desiring to be better, were unwilling to believe in the utter badness of anything human. Like a lover he would watch for the appearance of the vile motive, the self-interest, that "must be," *he knew*, at the heart of this or that deed or proceeding of apparent benevolence or generosity. Often, alas! the thing was provable; and where he did not find, he was quick to invent; and where he failed in finding or inventing, he not the less believed the bad motive was there, and followed the slightest seeming trail of the cunning demon only the more eagerly. What a smile was his when he heard, which truly he was not in the way to hear often, the praise of some good deed, or an ascription of high end to some endeavour of one of the vile race to which he belonged! Do those who abuse their kind actually believe

they are of it? Do they hold themselves exceptions? Do they never reflect, that it must be because such is their own nature, whether their accusation be true or false, that they know how to attribute such motives to their fellows? Or is it that, actually and immediately rejoicing in iniquity, they delight in believing it universal?

Quiet as a panther, Redmain was, I say, always in pursuit, if not of something sensual for himself, then of something evil in another. He would sit at his club, silent and watching, day after day, night after night, waiting for the chance that should cast light on some idea of detection, on some doubt, bewilderment, or conjecture. He would ask the farthest off questions: who could tell what might send him into the track of discovery? He would give to the talk the strangest turns, laying trap after trap to ensnare the most miserable of facts, elevated into a desirable secret only by his hope to learn through it something equally valueless beyond it. Especially he delighted in discovering, or flattering himself he had discovered, the hollow full of dead men's bones under the flowery lawn of seeming goodness. Nor as yet had he, so far as he knew, or at least was prepared to allow, ever failed. And this he called the study of human nature, and quoted Pope. Truly, next to God, the proper study of mankind is man; but how shall a man that knows only the evil in himself, nor sees it hateful, read the thousandfold compounded heart of his neighbour? To rake over the contents of an ash-pit, is not to study geology. There were motives in Redmain's own being, which he was not merely incapable of understanding, but incapable of seeing, incapable of suspecting.

The game had for him all the pleasure of keenest speculation; nor that alone, for in the supposed discovery of the evil of another, he felt himself vaguely righteous.

One more point in his character I may not in fairness omit: he had naturally a strong sense of justice; and if he exercised it but little in some of the relations of his life, he was none the less keenly alive to his own claims on its score; for chiefly he cried out for fair play on behalf of those who were wicked in similar fashion to himself. But in truth no one dealt so hardly with Redmain as his own conscience at such times when suffering and fear had awaked it.

So much for a portrait-sketch of the man to whom Mortimer had sold his daughter:—such was the man whom Hesper, entirely aware that none could compel her to marry against her will, had, partly from fear of her father, partly from moral laziness, partly from reverence for the Moloch of society, whose priestess was her mother, vowed to love, honour, and obey! In justice to her, it must be remembered, however, that she did not and could not know of him what her father knew.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### MRS. REDMAIN.

In the autumn the Redmains went to Durnmelling: why they did so, I should find it hard to say. If, when a child, Hesper loved either of her parents, the experiences of later years had so heaped that filial affection with the fallen leaves of dead hopes and vanished dreams, that there was now nothing in her heart recognizable to herself as love to father or mother. She always behaved to them, of course, with perfect propriety; never refused any small request; never showed resentment when blamed —never felt any, for she did not care enough to be angry or sorry that father or mother should disapprove.

On the other hand, Lady Margaret saw great improvement in her daughter. To the maternal eye, jealous for perfection, Hesper's carriage was at length satisfactory. It was cold, and the same to her mother as to every one else, but the mother did not find it too cold. It was haughty, even repellent, but by no means in the mother's eyes repulsive. Her voice came from her in well-balanced sentences, sounding as if they had been secretly constructed for extempore use, like the points of a parliamentary orator. "Marriage has done everything for her!" said Lady Malice to herself with a dignified chuckle, and dismissed the last shadowy remnant of maternal regret for her part in the transaction of her marriage.

She never saw herself in the wrong, and never gave herself the least trouble to be in the right. She was in

good health, ate, and liked to eat; drank her glass of champagne, and would have drunk a second, but for her complexion, and that it sometimes made her feel ill, which was the only thing, after marrying Mr. Redmain, she ever felt degrading. Of her own worth she had never had a doubt, and she had none yet: how was she to generate one, courted wherever she went, both for her own beauty and her husband's wealth?

To her father she was as stiff and proud as if she had been a maiden aunt, bent on destroying what expectations from her he might be cherishing. Who will blame her? He had done her all the ill he could, and by his own deed she was beyond his reach. Nor can I see that the debt she owed him for being her father was of the heaviest.

Her husband was again out of health—certain attacks to which he was subject were now coming more frequently. I do not imagine his wife offered many prayers for his restoration. Indeed she never prayed for the thing she desired; and while he and she occupied separate rooms, the one solitary thing she now regarded as a privilege, how *could* she pray for his recovery?

Greatly contrary to Mr. Redmain's unexpressed desire, Miss Yolland had been installed as Hesper's cousin-companion. After the marriage she ventured to unfold a little, as she had promised, but what there was yet of womanhood in Hesper had shrunk from farther acquaintance with the dimly shadowed mysteries of Sepia's story; and Sepia, than whom none more sensitive to change of atmosphere, had instantly closed again; and now not unfrequently looked and spoke like one feeling her way. The only life-principle she had, so far as I know, was to get from the moment the greatest possible enjoyment that would leave the way clear for more to follow. She had

not been in his house a week before Mr. Redmain hated her. He was something given to hating people who came near him, and she came much too near. She was by no means so different in character as to be repulsive to him; neither was she so much alike as to be tiresome; their designs could not well clash, for she was a woman and he was a man; if she had not been his wife's friend, they might perhaps have got on together better than well; but the two were such as must either be hand in glove, or hate each other. There had not, however, been the least approach to rupture between them. Mr. Redmain, indeed, took no trouble to avoid such a catastrophe, but Sepia was far too wise to allow even the dawn of such a risk. When he was ill, he was, if possible, more rude to her than to every one else, but she did not seem to mind it a straw. Perhaps she knew something of the ways of such *gentlemen* as lose their manners the moment they are ailing, and seem to consider a headache or an attack of indigestion excuse sufficient for behaving like the cad they scorn. It was not long, however, before he began to take in her a very real interest, though not of a sort it would have made her comfortable with him to know.

Every time Mr. Redmain had an attack, the baldness on the top of his head widened, and the skin of his face tightened on his small neat features; his long arms looked longer; his formerly flat back rounded yet a little; and his temper grew yet more curiously spiteful. Long after he had begun to recover, he was by no means an agreeable companion. Nevertheless, as if at last, though late in the day, she must begin to teach her daughter the duty of a married woman, from the moment he arrived, taken ill on the way, Lady Malice, regardless of the brusqueness with which he treated her from the first, devoted herself to him with an attention she had never

shown her husband. She was the only one who manifested any appearance of affection for him, and the only one of the family for whom, in return, he came to show the least consideration. Rough he was, even to her, but never, except when in absolute pain, rude as to everybody in the house besides. At times, one might have almost thought he stood in some little awe of her. Every night, after his man was gone, she would visit him to see that he was left comfortable, would tuck him up as his mother might have done, and satisfy herself that the night-light was shaded from his eyes. With her own hands she always arranged his breakfast on the tray, nor ever omitted taking him a basin of soup before he got up; and whatever he may have concluded concerning *her* motives, he gave no sign of imagining them other than generous. Perhaps the part in him which had never had the opportunity of behaving ill to his mother, and so had not choked up its channels with wrong, remained, in middle age and illness, capable of receiving kindness.

Hesper saw the relation between them, but without the least pleasure or the least curiosity. She seemed to care for nothing—except the keeping of her back straight. What it could be, inside that lovely form, that gave itself pleasure to be, were a difficult question indeed. The bear as he lies in his winter nest, sucking his paw, has no doubt his rudimentary theories of life, and those will coincide with a desire for its continuance; but whether what either the lady or the bear counts the good of life, be really that which makes either desire its continuance, is another question. Mere life without suffering seems enough for most people, but I do not think it could go on so for ever. I cannot help fancying that, but for death, utter dreariness would at length master the healthiest in whom the true life has not begun to shine. But so satis-

fying is the mere earthly existence to some at present, that this remark must sound to them bare insanity.

Partly out of compliment to Mr. Redmain, the Mortimers had scarcely a visitor; for he would not come out of his room when he knew there was a stranger in the house. Fond of company of a certain kind when he was well, he could not endure an unknown face when he was ill. He told Lady Malice that at such times a stranger always looked a devil to him. Hence the time was dull for everybody—dullest perhaps for Sepia, who, as well as Redmain, had a few things that required forgetting. It was no wonder then that Hesper, after a fortnight of it, should think once more of the young woman in the draper's shop at Testbridge. One morning, in consequence, she ordered her brougham, and drove to the town.

# CHAPTER XXIII.

## THE MENIAL.

THINGS had been going nowise really better with Mary, though there was now more lull and less storm around her. The position was becoming less and less endurable to her, and she had as yet no glimmer of a way out of it. Breath of genial air never blew in the shop, except when this and that customer entered it. But how dear the dull old chapel had grown! Not that she heard anything more to her mind, or that she paid any more attention to what was said; but the memory of her father filled the place, and when the Bible was read, or some favourite hymn sung, he seemed to her actually present. And might not love, she thought, even love to her, be strong enough to bring him from the gracious freedom of the new life, back to the house of bondage, to share it for an hour with his daughter?

When Hesper entered, she was disappointed to see Mary so much changed. But when, at sight of her, the pale face brightened, and a faint rosy flush overspread it from brow to chin, Mary was herself again as Hesper had known her; and the radiance of her own presence reflected from Mary, cast a reflex of sunshine into the February of Hesper's heart: had Mary known how long it was since such a smile had lighted the face she so much admired, hers would have flushed with a profounder pleasure. Hesper was human after all, though her humanity was only molluscous as yet, and it is not

in the power of humanity in any stage of development to hold itself indifferent to the pleasure of being loved. Also, poor as is the feeling comparatively, it is yet a reflex of love itself—the shine of the sun in a rain-pool.

She walked up to Mary, holding out her hand.

"Oh, ma'am, I am so glad to see you!" exclaimed Mary, forgetting her manners in her love.

"I too am glad," drawled Hesper, genuinely, though with condescension. "I hope you are well. I cannot say you look so."

"I am pretty well, thank you, ma'am," answered Mary, flushing afresh: not much anxiety was anywhere expressed about her health now, except by Beenie, who mourned over the loss of her plumpness, and told her if she did not eat she would soon follow her poor father.

"Come and have a drive with me," said Hesper, moved by a sudden impulse: through some hidden motion of sympathy, she felt, as she looked at her, that the place was stuffy. "It will do you good," she went on. "You are too much indoors.—And the ceiling is low," she added, looking up.

"It is very kind of you," replied Mary, "but—I don't think I could quite manage it to-day."

She looked round as she spoke. There were not many customers; but for conscience's sake she was trying hard to give as little ground for offence as possible.

"Why not?—If I were to ask Mr.—"

"If you really wish it, ma'am, I will venture to go for half an hour. There is no occasion to speak to Mr. Turnbull. Besides, it is almost dinner-time."

"Do then. I am sure you will eat a better dinner for having had a little fresh air first. It is a lovely morning. We will drive to the Roman camp on the top of Clover-down."

"I shall be ready in two minutes," said Mary, and ran from the shop.

As she passed along the outside of his counter coming back, she stopped and told Mr. Turnbull where she was going. Instead of answering her, he turned himself towards Mrs. Redmain, and went through a series of bows and smiles recognizant of favour, which she did not choose to see. She turned and walked from the shop, got into the brougham, and made room for Mary at her side.

But although the drive was a lovely one, and the view from either window delightful, and to Mary it was like getting out of a tomb to leave the shop in the middle of the day, she saw little of the sweet country on any side, so much occupied was she with Hesper. Ere they stopped again at the shop-door, the two young women were nearer being friends than Hesper had ever before been with any one. The sleepy heart in her was not yet dead, but capable still of the pleasure of showing sweet condescension and gentle patronage to one who admired her, and was herself agreeable. To herself she justified her kindness to Mary with the remark that *the young woman deserved encouragement*—whatever that might mean —*because she was so anxious to improve herself!*—a duty Hesper could recognize in another.

As they went, Mary told her something of her miserable relations with the Turnbulls; and as they returned, Hesper actually—this time with perfect seriousness—proposed that she should give up business, and live with her.

Nor was this the ridiculous thing it may at first sight appear to not a few of my readers. It arose from what was almost the first movement in the direction of genuine friendship Hesper had ever felt. She had been familiar in her time with a good many, but familiarity is not

friendship, and may or may not exist along with it. Some who would scorn the idea of a *friendship* with such as Mary, will be familiar enough with maids as selfish as themselves, and part from them—no—part *with* them, the next day, or the next hour, with never a twinge of regret. Of this Hesper was as capable as any; but friendship is its own justification, and she felt no horror at the new motion of her heart. At the same time she did not recognize it as friendship, and had she suspected Mary of regarding their possible relation in that light, she would have dismissed her with pride, perhaps contempt. Nevertheless the sorely whelmed divine thing in her had uttered a feeble sigh of incipient longing after the real; Mary had begun to draw out the love in her; while her conventional judgment justified the proposed extraordinary proceeding with the argument of the endless advantages to result from having in the house, devoted to her wishes, a young woman with an absolute genius for dressmaking; one capable not only of originating in that foremost of arts, but, no doubt, with a little experience, of carrying out also with her own hands, the ideas of her mistress. No more would she have to send for the dressmaker on every smallest necessity! No more must she postpone confidence in her appearance, that was, in herself, until Sepia, dressed, should be at leisure to look her over! Never yet had she found herself the best dressed in a room: now there would be hope!

Nothing, however, was clear in her mind as to the position she would have Mary occupy. She had a vague feeling that one like her ought not to be expected to undertake things befitting such women as her maid Folter; for between Mary and Folter there was, she saw, less room for comparison than between Folter and a naked Hottentot. She was incapable, at the same time,

of seeing that, in the eyes of certain courtiers of a high kingdom, not much known to the world of fashion, but not the less judges of the beautiful, there was a far greater difference between Mary and herself, than between herself and her maid, or between her maid and the Hottentot. For, while the said beholders could hardly have been astonished at Hesper's marrying Mr. Redmain, there would, had Mary done such a thing, have been dismay and a hanging of the head before the face of her Father in heaven.

"Come and live with me, Miss Marston," said Hesper; but it was with a laugh, and that light touch of the tongue which suggests but a flying fancy spoken but for the sake of the preposterous; while Mary, not forgetting she had heard the same thing once before, heard it with a smile, and had no rejoinder ready; whereupon Hesper, who was in reality feeling her way, ventured a little more seriousness.

"I should never ask you to do anything you would not like," she said.

"I don't think you could," answered Mary. "There are more things I should like to do for you than you would think to ask.—In fact," she added, looking round with a loving smile, "I don't know what I shouldn't like to do for you."

"My meaning was, that, as a thing of course, I should never ask you to do anything menial," explained Hesper, venturing a little farther still, and now speaking in a tone perfectly matter-of-fact.

"I don't know what you intend by *menial*," returned Mary.

Hesper thought it not unnatural she should not be familiar with the word, and proceeded to explain it as

well as she could. That seeming ignorance may be the consequence of more knowledge, she had yet to learn.

"*Menial*, don't you know?" she said, "is what you give servants to do."

But therewith she remembered that Mary's help in certain things wherein her maid's incapacity was harrowing, was one of the hopes she mainly cherished in making her proposal: that definition of *menial* would hardly do!

"I mean, I mean," she resumed, with a little embarrassment, a rare thing with her, "—things like—like—cleaning one's shoes, don't you know?—or brushing your hair."

Mary burst out laughing.

"Let me come to you to-morrow morning," she said, "and I will brush your hair that you will want me to come again the next day. You beautiful creature! whose hands would not be honoured to handle such a lovely stuff as that?"

As she spoke, she took in her fingers a little stray drift from the masses of golden twilight that crowned one of the loveliest temples in which the Holy Ghost had not yet come to dwell.

"If cleaning your shoes be menial, brushing your hair must be royal," she added.

Hesper's heart was touched; and if at the same time her *self* was flattered, the flattery was mingled with its best antidote—love.

"Do you really mean," she said, "you would not mind doing such things for me?—Of course I should not be exacting."

She laughed again, afraid of showing herself too much in earnest before she was sure of Mary.

"You would not ask me to do anything *menial?*" said Mary archly.

"I dare not promise," said Hesper, in tone responsive. "How could I help it, if I saw you longing to do what I was longing to have you do?" she added, growing more and more natural.

"I would no more mind cleaning your boots than my own," said Mary.

"But I should not like to clean my own boots," rejoined Hesper.

"No more should I, except it had to be done. Even then I would much rather not," returned Mary, "for cleaning my own would not interest me. To clean yours would. Still I would rather not, for the time might be put to better use—except always it were necessary, and then of course it couldn't. But as to anything degrading in it, I scorn the idea. I heard my father once say, that to look down on those who have to do such things may be to despise them for just the one honourable thing about them.—Shall I tell you what I understand by the word *menial*? You know it has come to have a disagreeable taste about it, though at first it only meant, as you say, something that fell to the duty of attendants."

"Do tell me," answered Hesper, with careless permission.

"I did not find it out myself," said Mary. "My father taught me. He was a wise, as well as a good man, Mrs. Redmain."

"Oh!" said Hesper, with the ordinary indifference of fashionable people to what an inferior may imagine worth telling them.

"He said," persisted Mary notwithstanding, "that it is menial to undertake anything you think beneath you, for the sake of money; and still more menial, having undertaken it, not to do it as well as possible."

"That would make out a good deal more of the menial

in the world than is commonly supposed," laughed Hesper. "I wonder who would do anything for you if you didn't pay them—one way or another!"

"I've taken my father's shoes out of Beenie's hands many a time," said Mary, "and finished them myself, just for the pleasure of making them shine for *him*."

"Re-a-ally!" drawled Hesper, and set out for the conclusion that after all it was no such great compliment the young woman had paid her in wanting to brush her hair. Evidently she had a taste for low things!—was naturally menial!—would do as much for her own father as for a lady like her! But the light in Mary's eyes checked her.

"Any service done without love, whatever it be," resumed Mary, "is slavery—neither more nor less. It cannot be anything else. So, you see, most slaves are made slaves by themselves; and that is what makes me doubtful whether I ought to go on serving in the shop; for, as far as the Turnbulls are concerned, I have no pleasure in it; I am only helping them to make money, not doing them any good."

"Why do you not give it up at once then?" asked Hesper.

"Because I like serving the customers. They were my father's customers; and I have learned so much from having to wait on them!"

"Well, now," said Hesper, with a rush for the goal, "if you will come to me, I will make you comfortable; and you shall do just as much or as little as you please."

"What will your maid think?" suggested Mary. "If I am to do what I please, she will soon find me trespassing on her domain."

"I never trouble myself about what my servants think," said Hesper.

"But it might hurt her, you know—to be paid to do a thing, and then not allowed to do it."

"She may take herself away then. I had not thought of parting with her, but I should not be at all sorry if she went. She would be no loss to me."

"Why should you keep her then?"

"Because one is just as good—and as bad as another. She knows my ways, and I prefer not having to break in a new one. It is a bore to have to say how you like everything done."

"But you are speaking now as if you meant it," said Mary, waking up to the fact that Hesper's tone was of business, and she no longer seemed half playing with the proposal. "*Do* you mean you want me to come and live with you?"

"Indeed, I do," answered Hesper emphatically. "You shall have a room close to my bedroom, and there you shall do as you like all day long; and when I want you, I daresay you will come."

"Fast enough," said Mary cheerily, as if all was settled. In contrast with her present surroundings, the prospect was more than attractive. "—But would you let me have my piano?" she asked, with sudden apprehension.

"You shall have my grand piano always when I am out, which will be every night in the season, I daresay. That will give you plenty of practice; and you will be able to have the best of lessons. And think of the concerts and oratorios you will go to!"

As she spoke, the carriage drew up at the door of the shop, and Mary took her leave. Hesper accepted her acknowledgments in the proper style of a benefactress, and returned her good-bye kindly. But not yet did she shake hands with her.

Some of my readers may wonder that Mary should for a moment dream of giving up what they would call her independence; for was she not on her own ground

in the shop of which she was a proprietor? and was the change proposed, by whatever name it might be called, anything other than *service?* But they are outside it, and Mary was in it, and knew how little such an independence was worth the name. Almost everything about the shop had altered in its aspect to her. The very air she breathed in it seemed slavish. Nor was the change in her. The whole thing was growing more and more sordid, for now —save for her part—the one spirit ruled it entirely. The work had therefore more or less grown a drudgery to her. The spirit of gain was in full blast, and whoever did not trim his sails to it was in danger of finding it rough weather. No longer could she, without offence, and consequent disturbance of spirit, arrange her attendance as she pleased, or have the same time for reading as before. She could encounter black looks, but she could not well live with them; and how was she to continue the servant of such ends as were now exclusively acknowledged in the place? The proposal of Mrs. Redmain stood in advantageous contrast to this treadmill-work. In her house she would be called only to the ministrations of love, and would have plenty of time for books and music, with a thousand means of growth unapproachable in Testbridge. All the slavery lay in the shop, all the freedom in the personal service. But she strove hard to suppress anxiety, for she saw that of all poverty-stricken contradictions, a Christian with little faith is the worst.

The chief attraction to her, however, was simply Hesper herself. She had fallen in love with her—I hardly know how otherwise to describe the current with which her being set towards her. Few hearts are capable of loving as she loved. It was not merely that she saw in Hesper a grand creature, and lovely to look upon, or that one so much her superior in position showed such a

liking for herself; she saw in her one she could help, one at least who sorely needed help, for she seemed to know nothing of what made life worth having—one who had done, and must yet be capable of doing things degrading to the humanity of womanhood. Without the hope of helping in the highest sense, Mary could not have taken up her abode in such a house as Mrs. Redmain's. No outward service of any kind, even to the sick, was to her service enough to *choose:* were it laid upon her, she would hasten to it; for necessity is the push, gentle or strong, as the man is more or less obedient, by which God sends him into the path he would have him take. But to help to the birth of a beautiful Psyche, enveloped all in the gummy cerecloths of its chrysalis, not yet aware, even, that it must get out of them, and spread great wings to the sunny wind of God —that was a thing for which the holiest of saints might well take a servant's place—the thing for which the Lord of life had done it before him. To help out such a lovely sister—how Hesper would have drawn herself up at the word! it is mine, not Mary's—as she would be when no longer holden of death, but her real self, the self God meant her to be when he began making her, would indeed be a thing worth having lived for! Between the ordinarily benevolent woman and Mary Marston, there was about as great a difference as between the fashionable church-goer and Catherine of Siena. She would be Hesper's servant that she might gain Hesper. I would not have her therefore wondered at as a marvel of humility. She was simply a young woman who believed that the man called Jesus Christ is a real person, such as those represent him who profess to have known him; and she therefore believed the man himself—believed that, when he said a thing, he entirely meant

it, knowing it to be true; believed, therefore, that she had no choice but do as he told her. That man was the servant of all; therefore, to regard *any* honest service as degrading, would be, she saw, to deny Christ, to call the life of creation's hero a disgrace. Nor was he the first servant; he did not of himself choose his life; the Father gave it him to live—sent him to be a servant, because he, the Father, is the first and greatest servant of all. He gives it to one to serve as the rich can, to another as the poor must. The only disgrace, whether of the counting-house, the shop, or the family, is to think the service degrading. If it be such, why not sit down and starve rather than do it? No man has a right to disgrace himself. Starve, I say; the world will lose nothing in you, for you are its disgrace, who count service degrading. You are much too grand people for what your Maker requires of you, and does himself, and yet you do it after a fashion, because you like to eat and go warm. You would take rank in the kingdom of hell, not the kingdom of heaven. But obedient love, learned by the meanest Abigail, will make of her an angel of ministration, such a one as he who came to Peter in the prison, at whose touch the fetters fell from the limbs of the apostle.

"What forced, overdriven, Utopian stuff! A kingdom always coming, and never come! I hold by what *is*. This solid, ploughable earth will serve my turn. My business is what I can find in the oyster."

I hear you, friend. Your answer will come whence you do not look for it. For some their only answer will be the coming of that which they deny; and the *Presence* will be a very different thing to those who desire it and those who do not. In the meantime, if we are not yet able to serve like God from pure love, let us do it be-

cause it is his way; so shall we come to do it from pure love also.

The very next morning, as she called it—that is, at four o'clock in the afternoon—Hesper again entered the shop, and, to the surprise and annoyance of the master of it, was taken by Mary through the counter and into the house. "What a false impression," thought the great man, "will it give of the way *we* live, to see the Marston's shabby parlour in a warehouse!" But he would have been more astonished and more annoyed still, had the deafening masses of soft goods that filled the house permitted him to hear through them what passed between the two. Before they came down, Mary had accepted a position in Mrs. Redmain's house, if that may be called a position which was so undefined; and Hesper had promised that she would not mention the matter. For Mary judged Mr. Turnbull would be too glad to get rid of her to mind how brief the notice she gave him, and she would rather not undergo the remarks that were sure to be made in contempt of her scheme. She counted it only fair, however, to let him know that she intended giving up her place behind the counter, hinting that, as she meant to leave when it suited her without further warning, it would be well to look out at once for one to take her place.

As to her money in the business, she scarcely thought of it, and said nothing about it, believing it as safe as in the bank. It was in the power of a dishonest man who prided himself on his honesty—the worst kind of rogue in the creation; but she had not yet learned to think of him as a dishonest man—only as a greedy one—and the money had been there ever since she had heard of money.

Mr. Turnbull was so astonished by her communica-

tion that, not seeing at once how the change was likely to affect him, he held his peace—with the cunning pretence that his silence arose from anger. His first feeling was of pleasure, but the man of business must take care how he shows himself pleased. On reflection, he continued pleased; for, as they did not seem likely to succeed in securing Mary in the way they had wished, the next best thing certainly would be to get rid of her. Perhaps indeed it was the very best thing; for it would be easy to get George a wife more suitable to the position of his family than a little canting dissenter, and her money would be in their hands all the same; while, once clear of her haunting cat-eyes, ready to pounce upon whatever her soft-headed father had taught her was wicked, he could do twice the business. But while he continued pleased, he continued careful not to show his satisfaction, for she would then go smelling about for the cause! During three whole days, therefore, he never spoke to her. On the fourth, he spoke as if nothing had ever been amiss between them, and showed some interest in her farther intentions. But Mary, in the straightforward manner peculiar to herself, told him she preferred not speaking of them at present; whereupon the cunning man concluded that she wanted a place in another shop, and was on the outlook—prepared to leave the moment one should turn up.

She asked him one day whether he had yet found a person to take her place.

"Time enough for that," he answered. "You're not gone yet."

"As you please, Mr. Turnbull," said Mary. "It was merely that I should be sorry to leave you without sufficient help in the shop."

"And *I* should be sorry," rejoined Turnbull, "that

Miss Marston should fancy herself indispensable to the business she turned her back upon."

From that moment, the restraint he had for the last week or two laid upon himself thus broken through, he never spoke to her except with such rudeness that she no longer ventured to address him even on shop-business; and all the people in the place, George included, following the example so plainly set them, she felt, when, at last, in the month of November, a letter from Hesper heralded the hour of her deliverance, that to take any formal leave would be but to expose herself to indignity. She therefore merely told Turnbull one evening as he left the shop, that she would not be there in the morning, and was gone from Testbridge before it was opened the next day.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### MRS. REDMAIN'S DRAWING-ROOM.

A FEW years ago, a London drawing-room was seldom beautiful; but size is always something, and if Mrs. Redmain's had not harmony, it had gilding—a regular upholsterer's drawing-room it was, on which about as much taste had been expended as on the fattening of a prize-pig. Happily there is as little need as temptation to give any description of it, with its sheets of glass and steel, its lace curtains, crude-coloured walls and floor and couches, and glittering chandeliers of a thousand prisms. Everybody knows the kind of room—a huddle of the chimera ambition wallowing in the chaos of the common-place—no miniature world of harmonious abiding. The only interesting thing in it was, that on all sides were doors, which must lead out of it, and might lead to a better place.

It was about eleven o'clock of a November morning—more like one in March. There might be a thick fog before the evening, but now the sun was shining like a brilliant lump of ice—so inimical to heat, apparently, that a servant had just dropped the venetian blind of one of the windows to shut his basilisk-gaze from the sicken-ing fire, which was now rapidly recovering. Betwixt the cold sun and the hard earth, a dust-befogged wind, plainly borrowed from March, was sweeping the street.

Mr. and Mrs. Redmain had returned to town thus early because their country-place was in Cornwall, and there Mr. Redmain was too far from his physician. He

was now considerably better, however, and had begun to go about again, for the weather did not yet affect him much. He was now in his study, as it was called, where he generally had his breakfast alone. Mrs. Redmain always had hers in bed, as often with a new novel as she could, of which her maid cut the leaves, and skimmed the cream. But now she was descending the stair, straight as a Greek goddess, and about as cold as the marble she is made of—mentally rigid, morally imperturbable, and vacant of countenance to a degree hardly equalled by the most ordinary of goddesses. She entered the drawing-room with a slow, careless, yet stately step, which belonged to her, I cannot say by nature, for it was not natural, but by ancestry. She walked to the chimney, seated herself in a low soft shiny chair almost on the hearth-rug, and gazed listlessly into the fire. In a minute she rose and rang the bell.

"Send my maid, and shut the door," she said.

The woman came.

"Has Miss Yolland left her room yet?" she asked.

"No, ma'am."

"Let her know I am in the drawing-room."

This said, she resumed her fire-gazing.

There was not much to see in the fire, for the fire is but a reflector, and there was not much behind the eyes that looked into it for that fire to reflect. Hesper was no dreamer—the more was the pity, for dreams are often the stuff out of which actions are made. Had she been a truer woman she might have been a dreamer, but where was the space for dreaming in a life like hers, without heaven, therefore without horizon, with so much room for desiring and so little room for hope? The buzz that greeted her entrance of a drawing-room, was the chief joy she knew; to inhabit her well-dressed body in the

presence of other well-dressed bodies, her highest notion of existence. And even upon these hung ever as an abating fog the consciousness of having a husband. I cannot say she was tired of marriage, for she had loathed her marriage from the first, and had not found it at all better than her expectation: she had been too ignorant to forebode half its horrors.

Education she had had but little that was worth the name, for she had never been set growing; and now, although well endowed by nature, she was gradually becoming stupid. People who have plenty of money, and neither hope nor aspiration, must become stupid, except indeed they hate, and then for a time the devil in them will make them a sort of clever.

Miss Yolland came undulating. No kiss, no greeting whatever passed between the ladies. Sepia began at once to re-arrange a few hot-house flowers on the mantel-piece, looking herself much like some dark flower painted in an old missal.

"This day twelve months!" said Hesper.

"I know," returned Sepia.

"If one could die without pain, and there was nothing to come after!" said Hesper. "What a tiresome dream it is!"

"Dream, or nightmare, or what you will, you had better get all you can out of it before you break it," said Sepia.

"You seem to think it worth keeping!" yawned Hesper.

Sepia smiled, with her face to the glass, in which she saw the face of her cousin with her eyes on the fire; but she made no answer. Hesper went on.

"Ah!" she said, "your story is not mine. You are free; I am a slave. You are alive; I am in my coffin."

"That's marriage," said Sepia drily.

"It would not matter much," continued Hesper, "if you could have your coffin to yourself; but when you have to share it—ugh!"

"If I were you, then," said Sepia, "I would not lie still; I would get up and bite—I mean, be a vampire."

Hesper did not answer. Sepia turned from the mirror, looked at her, and burst into a laugh—at least the sound she made had all the elements of a laugh—except the merriment.

"Now really, Hesper, you ought to be ashamed of yourself," she cried. "You to put on the pelican and the sparrow, with all the world before you, and all the men in it at your feet!"

"A pack of fools!" remarked Hesper, with a calmness which in itself was scorn.

"I don't deny it—but amusing fools—you must allow that!"

"They don't amuse me."

"That's your fault: you won't be amused. The more foolish they are, the more amusing I find them."

"I am sick of it all. Nothing amuses me. How can it, when there is nothing behind it? You can't live on amusement. It is the froth on water an inch deep, and then the mud!"

"I declare, misery makes a poetess of you!—But as to the mud, I don't mind a little mud. It is only dirt, and has its part in the inevitable peck, I hope."

"*I* don't mind mud so long as you can keep out of it. But when one is over head and ears in it, I should like to know what life is worth," said Hesper, heedless that the mud was of her own making. "I declare, Sepia," she went on, drawling the declaration, "if I were to be asked whether I would go on or not—"

"You would ask a little time to make up your mind, Hesper, I fancy," suggested Sepia, for Hesper had paused. As she did not reply, Sepia resumed.

"Which is your favourite poison, Hesper?" she said.

"When I choose, it will be to use," replied Hesper.

"Riming at last!" said Sepia.

But Hesper would not laugh, and her perfect calmness checked the laughter which would have been Sepia's natural response; she was careful not to go too far.

"Do you know, Hesper," she said with seriousness, "what is the matter with you?"

"Tolerably well," answered Hesper.

"You do not—let me tell you. You are nothing but a baby yet. You have no heart."

"If you mean that I have never been in love, you are right. But you talk foolishly; for you know that love is no more within my reach than if I were the corpse I feel."

Sepia pressed her lips together, and nodded knowingly; then, after a moment's pause, said,—

"When your hour is come, you will understand. Every woman's hour comes, one time or another—whether she will or not."

"Sepia, if you think that, because I hate my husband, I would allow another man to make love to me, you do not know me yet."

"I know you very well; you do not know yourself, Hesper; you do not know the heart of a woman—because your own has never come awake yet."

"God forbid it ever should then—so long as—as the man I hate is alive."

Sepia laughed.

"A good prayer," she said; "for who can tell what you might do to him!"

"Sepia, I sometimes think you are a devil."

"And I sometimes think you are a saint."

"What do you take me for the other times?"

"A hypocrite. What do *you* take *me* for the other times?"

"No hypocrite," answered Hesper.

With a light, mocking laugh, Sepia turned away, and left the room.

Hesper did not move. If stillness indicates thought, then Hesper was thinking; and surely of late she had suffered what might have waked something like thought in what would then have been something like a mind: all the machinery of thought was there—sorely clogged, and rusty; but for a woman to hate her husband is hardly enough to make a thinking creature of her. True as it was, there was no little affectation in her saying what she did about the worthlessness of her life. She was plump and fresh; her eye was clear, her hand firm and cool; suffering would have to go a good deal deeper before it touched in her the issues of life, or the love of it. What set her talking so, was in great part the ennui of endeavour after enjoyment, and the reaction from success in the pursuit. Her low moods were, however, far more frequent than, even with such fatigue and reaction to explain them, belonged to her years, her health, or her temperament.

The fire grew hot. Hesper thought of her complexion, and pushed her chair back. Then she rose, and, having taken a handscreen from the chimney-piece, was fanning herself with it, when the door opened, and a servant asked if she were at home to Mr. Helmer. She hesitated a moment: what an unearthly hour for a caller!

"Show him up," she answered: anything was better than her own company.

Tom Helmer entered—much the same—a little paler and thinner. He made his approach with a certain loose

grace natural to him, and seated himself on the chair, at some distance from her own, to which Mrs. Redmain motioned him.

Tom seldom failed of pleasing. He was well dressed, and not too much; and to the natural confidence of his shallow character, added the assurance born of a certain small degree of success in his profession, which he took for the pledge of approaching supremacy. He carried himself better than he used, and his legs therefore did not look so long. His hair continued to curl soft and silky about his head, for he protested against the fashionable convict-style. His hat was new, and he bore it in front of him like a ready apology.

It was to no presentableness of person, however, any more than to previous acquaintance, that Tom now owed his admittance. True, he had been to Durnmelling not unfrequently, but that was in the other world of the country, and even there Hesper had taken no interest in the self-satisfied, though not ill-bred youth, who went galloping about the country, showing off to rustic girls. It was merely, as I have said, that she could no longer endure a *tête-à-tête* with one she knew so little as herself, and whose acquaintance she was so little desirous of cultivating.

Tom had been to a small party at the house a few evenings before, brought thither by the well-known leader of a certain literary clique, who, in return for homage, not seldom took younger aspirants under a wing destined never to be itself more than half-fledged. It was, notwithstanding, broad enough already so to cover Tom with its shadow that under it he was able to creep into several houses of a sort of distinction, and amongst them into Mrs. Redmain's.

Nothing of less potency than the presumption attendant

on self-satisfaction, could have emboldened him to call thus early, and that in the hope not merely of finding Mrs. Redmain at home, but of finding her alone; and with the not unusual reward of unworthy daring, he had succeeded. He was ambitious of making himself acceptable to ladies of social influence, and of being known to stand well with such. In the case of Mrs. Redmain he was the more anxious because she had not received him on any footing of former acquaintance.

At the gathering to which I have referred, a certain song was sung by a lady, not without previous manœuvre on the part of Tom, with which Mrs. Redmain had languidly expressed herself pleased: that song he had now brought her—for, concerning words and music both, he might have said with Touchstone, "an ill-favoured thing, but mine own." He did not quote Touchstone because he believed both words and music superexcellent, the former being in truth not quite bad, and the latter nearly as good. Appreciation was the very hunger of Tom's small life, and here was a chance!

"I ought to apologize," he said airily, "and I will, if you will allow me."

Mrs. Redmain said nothing, only waited with her eyes. They were calm, reposeful eyes, not fixed, scarcely lying upon Tom. It was chilling, but he was not easily chilled when self was in the question—as it generally was with Tom. He felt, however, that he must talk or be lost.

"I have taken the liberty," he said, "of bringing you the song I had the pleasure—a greater pleasure than you will readily imagine—of hearing you admire the other evening."

"I forget," said Hesper.

"I would not have ventured," continued Tom, "had it not happened that both air and words were my own."

"Ah!—indeed!—I did not know you were a poet, Mr. ——"

She had forgot his name."

"That or nothing," answered Tom boldly.

"And a musician too?"

"At your service, Mrs. Redmain."

"I don't happen to want a poet at present—or a musician either," she said, with just enough of a smile to turn the rudeness into what Tom accepted as a flattering familiarity.

"Nor am I in want of a place," he replied with spirit; "a bird can sing on any branch. Will you allow me to sing this song on yours? Mrs. Downport scarcely gave the expression I could have desired.—May I read the verses before I sing them?"

Without either intimacy or encouragement, Tom was capable of offering to read his own verses! Such fools self-partisanship makes of us.

Mrs. Redmain was, for her, not a little amused with the young man: he was not just like every other that came to the house.

"I should li-i-ike," she said.

Tom laid himself back a little in his chair, with the sheet of music in his hand, closed his eyes, and repeated as follows:—he knew all his own verses by heart.

"Lovely lady, sweet disdain!
Prithee keep thy Love at home;
Bind him with a tressed chain;
Do not let the mischief roam.

"In the jewel-cave, thine eye,
In the tangles of thy hair,
It is well the imp should lie—
There his home, his heaven is there.

"But for pity's sake, forbid
Beauty's wasp at me to fly;
Sure the child should not be chid,
And his mother standing by.

"For if once the villain came
To my house, too well I know
He would set it all aflame—
To the winds its ashes blow.

"Prithee keep thy Love at home;
Net him up or he will start;
And if once the mischief roam,
Straight he'll wing him to my heart."

What there might be in verse like this to touch with faintest emotion, let him say who cultivates art for art's sake. Doubtless there is that in rhythm and rime and cadence, which will touch the pericardium, when the heart itself is not to be reached by divinest harmony; but whether such women as Hesper feel this touch, or only admire a song as they admire the church-prayers and Shakspere; or whether, imagining in it some *tour de force* of which they are themselves incapable, they therefore look upon it as a mighty thing, I am at a loss to determine. All I know is that a gleam as from some far-off mirror of admiration did certainly, to Tom's great satisfaction, appear on Hesper's countenance. As, however, she said nothing, he, to wave aside a threatening awkwardness, lightly subjoined,—

"Queen Anne is all the rage now, you see."

Mrs. Redmain knew that Queen-Anne houses were in fashion, and was even able to recognize one by its flush window-frames, while she had felt something odd, which might be old-fashioned, in the song: between the two she was led to the conclusion that the fashion of

Queen Anne's time had been revived in the making of verses also.

"Can you then make a song to any pattern you please?" she asked.

"I fancy so," answered Tom indifferently, as if it were nothing to him to do whatever he chose to attempt. And in fact he could imitate almost anything—and well too—the easier that he had nothing of his own pressing for utterance; for he had yet made no response to the first demand made on every man, the only demand for originality made on any man—that he should order his own way aright.

"How clever you must be!" drawled Hesper; and, notwithstanding the tone, the words were pleasant in the ears of goose Tom. He rose, opened the piano, and, with not a little cheap facility, began to accompany a sweet tenor voice in the song he had just read.

The door opened, and Mr. Redmain came in. He gave a glance at Tom as he sang, and went up to his wife where she still sat, with her face to the fire, and her back to the piano.

"New singing master, eh?" he said.

"No," answered his wife.

"Who the deuce is he?"

"I forget his name," replied Hesper, in the tone of one bored by question. "He used to come to Durnmelling."

"That is no reason why he should not have a name to him."

Hesper did not reply. Tom went on playing. The moment he struck the last chord, she called to him in a clear, soft, cold voice,—

"Will you tell Mr. Redmain your name? I happen to have forgot it."

Tom picked up his hat, rose, came forward, and, mentioning his name, held out his hand.

"I don't know you," said Mr. Redmain, touching his palm with two fingers that felt like small fishes.

"It is of no consequence," said his wife; "Mr. Aylmer is an old acquaintance of our family."

"Only you don't quite remember his name!"

"It is not my *friends'* names only I have an unhappy trick of forgetting. I often forget yours, Mr. Redmain!"

"My *good* name, you must mean."

"I never heard that."

Neither had raised the voice, or spoken with the least apparent anger.

Mr. Redmain gave a grin instead of a retort. He appreciated her sharpness too much to get one ready in time. Turning away, he left the room with a quiet, steady step, taking his grin with him: it had drawn the clear, scanty skin yet tighter on his face, and remained fixed; so that he vanished with something of the look of a hairless tiger.

The moment he disappeared, Tom's gaze, which had been fascinated, sought Hesper. Her lips were shaping the word *brute!*—Tom heard it with his eyes; her eyes were flashing, and her face was flushed. But the same instant, in a voice perfectly calm,—

"Is there anything else you would like to sing, Mr. Helmer?" she said. "Or,—"

Here she ceased, with the slightest possible choking —it was only of anger—in the throat.

Tom's was a sympathetic nature, especially where a pretty woman was in question. He forgot entirely that she had given quite as good, or as bad, as she received, and was hastening to say something foolish, imagining he had looked upon the sorrows of a lovely and unhappy

wife and was almost in her confidence, when Sepia entered the room, with a dark glow that flashed into dusky radiance at sight of the handsome Tom. She had noted him on the night of the party, and remembered having seen him at the merry-making in the old hall of Durnmelling, but he had not been introduced to her. A minute more, and they were sitting together in a bay window, blazing away at each other like two corvets, though their cartridges were often blank enough, while Hesper, never heeding them, kept her place by the chimney, her gaze transferred from the fire to the novel she had sent for from her bedroom.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### MARY'S RECEPTION.

In the afternoon of the same day, now dreary enough, with the dreariness naturally belonging to the dreariest month of the year, Mary arrived in the city preferred to all cities by those who live in it, but the most uninviting, I should imagine, to a stranger, of all cities on the face of the earth. Cold seemed to have taken to itself a visible form in the thin grey fog that filled the huge station from the platform to the glass roof. The latter had vanished, indistinguishable from sky invisible, and from the brooding darkness, in which the lamps innumerable served only to make spots of thinness. It was a mist, not a November fog properly so-called; but every breath breathed by every porter, as he ran along by the side of the slowly-halting train, was adding to its mass, which seemed to Mary to grow in bulk and density as she gazed. Her quiet, simple, decided manner at once secured her attention, and she was among the first who had their boxes on cabs and were driving away.

But the drive seemed interminable, and she had grown anxious and again calmed herself many times, before it came to an end. The house at which the cab drew up, was large, and looked as dreary as large, but scarcely drearier than any other house in London on that same night of November. The cabman rang the bell, but it was not until they had waited a time altogether unreasonable that the door at length opened, and a lofty, well-built footman in livery appeared framed in it.

Mary got out, and going up the steps, said she hoped

the driver had brought her to the right house: it was Mrs. Redmain's she wanted.

"Mrs. Redmain is not at home, miss," answered the man. "I didn't hear as how she was expecting of any one," he added, with a glance at the boxes, formlessly visible on the cab, through the now thicker darkness.

"She is expecting me, I know," returned Mary; "but of course she would not stay at home to receive me," she remarked with a smile.

"Oh!" returned the man, in a peculiar tone, and adding, "I'll see," went away, leaving her on the top of the steps, with the cabman behind her at the bottom of them, waiting orders to get her boxes down.

"It don't appear as you was over-welcome, miss!" he remarked: with his comrades on the stand he passed for a wit; "—leastways, it don't seem as your sheets was quite done hairing."

"It's all right," said Mary cheerfully.

She was not ready to imagine her dignity in danger, therefore did not provoke assault upon it by anxiety for its safety.

"I'm sorry to hear it, miss," the man rejoined.

"Why?" she asked.

"'Cause I should ha' liked to ha' taken *you* farther."

"But why?" said Mary, the second time, not understanding him, and not unwilling to cover the awkwardness of that slow minute of waiting.

"Because it gives a poor man with a whole family o' prowocations some 'at of a chance, to 'ave a affable young lady like you, miss, behind him in his cab, once a year, or thereabouts. It's not by no means as I'd have you go farther and fare worse, which it's a sayin' as I've heerd said, miss. So, if you're sure o' the place, I may as well be a gettin' down of *your* boxes."

So saying, he got on the cab, and proceeded to unfasten the chain that secured the luggage.

"Wait a bit, cabbie. Don't you be in sech a 'urry as if you was a 'ansom, now," cried the footman, reappearing at the farther end of the hall. "I should be sorry if there was a mistake, and you wasn't man enough to put your boxes up again without assistance." Then turning to Mary, "Mrs. Perkin says, miss—that's the housekeeper, miss," he went on, "—that, if as you're the young woman from the country—and I'm sure I beg your pardon if I make a mistake—it ain't my fault, miss —Mrs. Perkin says she did hear Mrs. Redmain make mention of one, but she didn't have any instructions concernin' her.—But as there you are," he continued more familiarly, gathering courage from Mary's nodded assent, "you can put your boxes in the hall, and sit down, she says, till Mrs. R. comes 'ome."

"Do you think she will be long?" asked Mary.

"Well, that's what no fellow can't say, seein' it's a new play as she's gone to. They call it Doomsday, an' there's no tellin' when parties is likely to come 'ome from that," said the man, with a grin of satisfaction at his own wit.

Was London such a happy place that everybody in it was given to joking? thought Mary.

"'Ere, mister! gi' me a 'and wi' this 'ere luggage," cried the cabman, finding the box he was getting down too much for him. "Yah wouldn't see me break my back, an' my poor 'orse standin' there a lookin' on—would ye now?"

"Why don't you bring a man with you?" objected the footman, as he descended the steps notwithstanding, to give the required assistance. "I ain't paid as a crane.—By Juppiter! what a weight the new party's boxes is!"

"Only that one," said Mary apologetically. "It is full of books. The other is not half so heavy."

"Oh, it ain't the weight, miss!" returned the footman, who had not intended she should hear the remark. "I believe Mr. Cabman and myself will prove equal to the occasion."

With that the book-box came down a great bump on the pavement, and presently both were in the hall, the one on the top of the other. Mary paid the cabman, who asked not a penny more than his fare; he departed with thanks; the facetious footman closed the door, told her to take a seat, and went away full of laughter, to report that the young person had brought a large library with her to enliven the dullness of her new situation.

Mrs. Perkin smiled crookedly, and in a tone of pleasant reproof, desired her laughter-compressing inferior not to forget his manners.

"Please, ma'am, am I to leave the young woman sittin' up there all by herself in the cold?" he asked, straightening himself up. "She do look a raythe superior sort of young person," he added, "and the 'all-stove is dead out."

"For the present, Castle," replied Mrs. Perkin.

She judged it wise to let the young woman have a lesson at once in subjection and inferiority.

Mrs. Perkin was a rather tall, rather thin, quite straight, and very dark-complexioned woman. She always threw her head back on one side, and her chin out on the other, when she spoke, and had about her a great deal of the authoritative, which she mingled with such consideration towards her subordinates, as to secure their obedience to her, while she cultivated antagonism to her mistress. She had had a better education than most persons of her class, but was morally not an atom their superior in consequence. She never went into a

new place but with the feeling that she was of more importance by far than her untried mistress, and the worthier person of the two. She entered her service, therefore, as one whose work it was to take care of herself against a woman whose mistress she ought to have been, had providence but started her with her natural rights. At the same time she would have been *almost* as much offended by a hint that she was not a Christian, as she would have been by a doubt whether she was a lady. For indeed she was both, if a great opinion of herself constituted the latter, and a great opinion of going to church constituted the former.

She had not been taken into Hesper's confidence with regard to Mary, had discovered that "a young person" was expected, but had learned nothing of what her position in the house was to be. She welcomed therefore this opportunity both of teaching Mrs. Redmain—she never called her her *mistress*, while severely she insisted on the other servants' speaking of her so—the propriety of taking counsel with her housekeeper, and of letting the young person know in time that Mrs. Perkin was in reality her mistress.

The relation of the upper servants of the house to their employers was more like that of the managers of a hotel to their guests. The butler, the lady's-maid, and Mr. Redmain's body-servant, who had been with him before his marriage, and was supposed to be deep in his master's confidence, ate with the housekeeper in her room, waited upon by the livery and maid servants, except the second cook:—the first cook only came to superintend the cooking of the dinner, and went away after. To all these Mrs. Perkin was careful to be just; and if she was precise even to severity with them, she was herself obedient to the system she had established—

the main feature of which was punctuality. She not only regarded punctuality as the foremost of virtues, but, in righteous moral sequence, made it the first of her duties; and the benefit everybody reaped. For nothing oils the household-wheels so well as this same punctuality. In a family, love, if it be strong, genuine, and patent, will make up for anything; but where there is no family and no love, the loss of punctuality will soon turn a house into the mere pouch of a social *inferno*. Here the master and mistress came and went, regardless of each other, and of all household polity; but their meals were ready for them to the minute, when they chose to be there to eat them; the carriage came round like one of the puppets on the Strasburg clock; the house was quiet as a hospital; the bells were answered—all except the door-bell outside of calling hours—with swiftness; you could not soil your fingers anywhere—not even if the sweep had been that same morning; the manners of the servants—*when serving*—were unexceptionable; but the house was scarcely more of a home than one of the huge hotels characteristic of the age.

In the hall of it sat Mary for the space of an hour, not exactly learning the lesson Mrs. Perkin had intended to teach her, but learning more than one thing Mrs. Perkin was not yet capable of learning. I cannot say she was comfortable, for she was both cold and hungry; but she was far from miserable. She had no small gift of patience, and had taught herself to look upon the less troubles of life as on a bad dream. There are children, though not yet many, capable, through faith in their parents, of learning not a little by their experience, and Mary was one of such: from the first she received her father's lessons like one whose business it was to learn them, and had thereby come to learn where he had himself learned. Hence

she was not one to say *our Father in heaven*, and act as if there were no such Father, or as if he cared but little for his children. She was even foolish enough to believe that that Father both knew and cared that she was hungry and cold and wearily uncomfortable; and thence she was weak enough to take the hunger and cold and discomfort as mere passing trifles, which could not last a moment longer than they ought. From her sore-tried endeavours after patience, had grown the power of active waiting—and a genuinely waiting child is one of the loveliest sights the earth has to show.

This was not the reception she had pictured to herself, as the train came rushing from Testbridge to London; she had not indeed imagined a warm one, but she had not expected to be forgotten—for so she interpreted her abandonment in the hall, which seemed to grow colder every minute. She saw no means of reminding the household of her neglected presence, and indeed would rather have remained where she was till the morning, than encounter the growing familiarity of the man who had admitted her. She did think once—if Mrs. Redmain were to hear of her reception, how she would resent it! and would have found it difficult to believe how far people like her are from troubling themselves about the behaviour of their servants to other people; for they have no idea of an obligation to rule their own house, neither seem to have a notion of being accountable for what goes on in it.

She had grown very weary, and began to long for a floor on which she might stretch herself; there was not a sound in the house but the ticking of a clock somewhere; and she was now wondering whether everybody had gone to bed, when she heard a step approaching, and presently Castle, who was the only man at home, stood up before

her, and, with the ease of perfect self-satisfaction, and as if there was nothing in the neglect of her but the custom of the house to cool people well in the hall before admitting them to its penetralia, said, "Step this way—miss;" the last word added after a pause of pretended hesitation, for the man had taken his cue from the housekeeper.

Mary rose, and followed him to the basement story, into a comfortable room, where sat Mrs. Perkin embroidering large sun-flowers on a piece of coarse stuff. She was *artistic*, and despised the whole style of the house.

"You may sit down," she said, and pointed to a chair near the door.

Mary, not a little amused, for all her discomfort, did as she was permitted, and awaited what should come next.

"What part of the country are you from?" asked Mrs. Perkin, with her usual diagonal upward toss of the chin, but without lifting her eyes from her work.

"From Testbridge," answered Mary.

"The servants in this house are in the habit of saying *ma'am* to their superiors: it is required of them," remarked Mrs. Perkin. But although her tone was one of rebuke, she said the words lightly, tossed the last of them off, indeed, almost playfully, as if the lesson was meant for one who could hardly have been expected to know better. "And what place did you apply for in the house?" she went on to ask.

"I can hardly say, ma'am," answered Mary, avoiding both inflection and emphasis, and by her compliance satisfying Mrs. Perkin that she had been right in requiring the *kotou*.

"It is not usual for young persons to be engaged without knowing for what purpose."

"I suppose not, ma'am."

"What wages were you to have?" next inquired Mrs. Perkin, gradually assuming a more decided drawl as she became more assured of her position with the stranger. She would gladly get some light on the affair. "You need not object to mentioning them," she went on, for she imagined Mary hesitated, whereas she was only a little troubled to keep from laughing; "I always pay the wages myself."

"There was nothing said about wages, ma'am," answered Mary.

"Indeed! Neither work nor wages specified? Excuse me if I say it seems rather peculiar.—We must be content to wait a little then,—until we learn what Mrs. Redmain expected of you, *and whether or not you are capable of it.* We can go no farther now."

"Certainly not, ma'am," assented Mary.

"Can you use your needle?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Have you done any embroidery?"

"I understand it a little, but I am not particularly fond of it."

"You mistake: I did not ask you whether you were fond of it," said Mrs. Perkin; "I asked you if you had ever done any;" and she smiled severely, but ludicrously, for a diagonal smile is apt to have a comic effect. "Here! —take off your gloves," she continued, "and let me see you do one of these loose-worked sun-flowers. They are the fashion now, though I daresay you will not be able to see the beauty of them."

"Please, ma'am," returned Mary, "if you will excuse me, I would rather go to my room. I have had a long journey, and am very tired."

"There is no room yours.—I have had no character

with you.—Nothing can be done till Mrs. Redmain comes home, and she and I have had a little talk about you. But you can go to the housemaid's—the second housemaid's room, I mean—and make yourself tidy. There is a spare bed in it, I believe, which you can have for the night; only mind you don't keep the girl awake talking to her, or she will be late in the morning, and that I never put up with. I think you will do. You seem willing to learn, and that is half the battle."

Therewith Mrs. Perkin, believing she had laid in awe the foundation of a rightful authority over the young person, gave her a nod of dismissal, which she intended to be friendly.

"Please, ma'am," said Mary, "could I have one of my boxes taken up stairs?"

"Certainly not. I cannot have two movings of them: I must take care of my men. And your boxes, I understand, are heavy, quite absurdly so. It would *look* better in a young person not to have so much to carry about with her."

"I have but two boxes, ma'am," said Mary.

"Full of *books*, I am told!"

"One of them only."

"You must do your best without them to-night. When I have made up my mind what is to be done with you, I shall let you have the one with your clothes; the other shall be put away in the box-room. I give my people what books I think fit. For light reading the *Fireside Herald* is quite enough for the room.—There—good night!"

Mary courtesied, and left her. At the door she glanced this way and that to find some indication to guide her steps. A door was open at the end of a passage, and from the odour that met her, it seemed

likely to be that of the kitchen. She approached, and peeped in.

"Who is that?" cried a voice irate.

It was the voice of the second cook, who was there supreme except when the chef was present. Mary stepped in, and the woman advanced to meet her.

"May I ask to what I am indebted for the hhonner of this unexpected visit?" said the second cook, whose head its overcharge of self-importance jerked hither and thither upon her neck, as she seized the opportunity of turning to her own use a sentence she had just read in the *Fireside Herald* which had taken her fancy—spoken by Lady Blanche Rivington Delaware to a detested lover disinclined to be dismissed.

"Would you please tell me where to find the second housemaid," said Mary. "Mrs. Perkin has sent me to her room."

"Why don't Mrs. Perkin show you the way, then?" returned the woman. "There ain't nobody else in the house as I knows on fit to send to the top o' them stairs with you. A nice way Jemim' 'ill be in when *she* comes 'ome, to find a stranger in her room!"

The same instant, however, the woman bethought herself that, if what she had said in her haste were reported, it would be as much as her place was worth; and at once thereupon she assumed a more complaisant tone. Casting a look at her saucepans, as if to warn them concerning their behaviour in her absence, she turned again to Mary, saying,—

"I believe I better show you the way myself. It's easier to take you than find a girl to do it. Them hussies is never where they oughto be! *You* follow *me*."

She led the way along two passages, and up a back staircase of stone—up and up, till Mary, unused to such

heights, began to be aware of knees. Plainly at last in the regions of the roof, she thought her hill Difficulty surmounted; but the cook turned a sharp corner, and Mary following found herself once more at the foot of a stair—very narrow and steep, leading up to one of those old-fashioned roof-turrets which had begun to appear in the new houses of that part of London.

"Are you taking me to the clouds, cook?" she said, willing to be cheerful, and to acknowledge her obligation for laborious guidance.

"Not yet a bit, I hope," answered the cook; "we'll get there soon enough, any how—excep' you belong to them peculiars as wants to be saints afore their time. If that's your sort, don't you come here; for a wickeder 'ouse, or an 'ouse as you got to work harder in o' Sundays, no one won't easily find in this here west end."

With these words she panted up the last few steps, immediately at the top of which was the room sought. It was a very small one, scarcely more than holding the two beds. Having lighted the gas, the cook left her; and Mary, noting that one of the beds was not made up, was glad to throw herself upon it. Covering herself with her cloak, her travelling-rug, and the woollen counterpane, she was soon fast asleep.

She was roused by a cry, half of terror, half of surprise. There stood the second housemaid, who, having been told nothing of her room-fellow, stared and gasped.

"I am sorry to have startled you," said Mary, who had half risen, leaning on her elbow. "They ought to have told you there was a stranger in your room."

The girl was not long from the country, and, in the midst of the worst vulgarity in the world, namely, amongst the servants of the selfish, her manners had not yet ceased to be simple. For a moment, however, she

seemed capable only of panting, and pressing her hand on her heart.

"I am very sorry," said Mary again; "but you see I won't hurt you! I don't look dangerous, do I?"

"No, miss," answered the girl, with a hysterical laugh. "I been to the play, and there was a man in it was a thief, you know, miss!" And with that she burst out crying.

It was some time before Mary got her quieted, but when she did, the girl was quite reasonable. She deplored that the bed was not made up, and would willingly have yielded hers; she was sorry she had not a clean nightgown to offer her—"not that it would be fit for the likes of *you*, miss!"—and showed herself full of friendly ministration. Mary being now without her travelling-cloak, Jemima judged from her dress she must be some grand visitor's maid, vastly her superior in the social scale: if she had taken her for an inferior, she would doubtless, like most, have had some airs handy.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### HER POSITION.

Mary seemed to have but just got to sleep again, when she was startled awake by the violent ringing of a bell, almost at her ear.

"Oh, you needn't trouble yet a long while, miss!" said the girl, who was already dressing. "I've got ever so many fires to light, ere the' 'll be a thought of you!"

Mary lay down again, and once more fell fast asleep.

She was waked the third time by the girl, telling her that breakfast was ready; whereupon she rose, and made

herself as tidy as she could, while Jemima *cleaned herself up a bit*, and was not a little improved in the process.

"I thought," she said, "as Mrs. Perkin would 'a' as't you to your first meal with her; but she told me, when I as't what were to be done with you, as how you must go to the room, and eat your breakfast with the rest of us."

"As Mrs. Perkin pleases," said Mary.

She had before this come to understand the word of her Master, that not what enters into a man defiles him, but only what comes out of him;—hence, that no man's dignity is affected by what another does to him, but only by what he does, or would like to do, himself.

She did, however, feel a little shy on entering "the room," where all the livery and most of the women servants were already seated at breakfast. Two of the men, with a word to each other, made room for her between them, and laughed; but she took no notice, and seated herself at the bottom of the table with her companion. Everything was as clean and tidy as heart could wish, and Mary was glad enough to make a good meal.

For a few minutes there was loud talking—from a general impulse to show off before the stranger; then fell a silence, as if some feeling of doubt had got amongst them. The least affected by it was the footman who had opened the door to her: he had witnessed her reception by Mrs. Perkin. Addressing her boldly, he expressed a hope that she was not too much fatigued by her journey. Mary thanked him in her own natural straightforward way, and the consequence was, that, when he spoke to her next, he spoke like a gentleman—in the tone natural to him, that is, and in the language of the parlour, without any mock-politeness. And, although the way they talked among themselves made Mary feel as if she were in a strange country, with strange modes, not of

living merely, but of feeling and of regarding, she received not the smallest annoyance during the rest of the meal—which did not last long: Mrs. Perkin took care of that.

For an hour or more, after the rest had scattered to their respective duties, she was left alone. Then Mrs. Perkin sent for her.

When she entered her room, she found her occupied with the cook, and was allowed to stand unnoticed.

"When shall I be able to see Mrs. Redmain, ma'am?" she asked, when the cook at length turned to go.

"Wait," rejoined Mrs. Perkin, with a quiet dignity, well copied, "until you are addressed, young woman."—Then first casting a glance at her, and perhaps perceiving on her countenance a glimmer of the amusement Mary felt, she began to gather a more correct suspicion of the sort of being she might possibly be, and hastily added, "Pray, take a seat."

The idea of making a blunder was unendurable to Mrs. Perkin, and she was most unwilling to believe she had done so; but, even if she had, to show that she knew it would only be to render it the more difficult to recover her pride of place. An involuntary twinkle about the corners of Mary's mouth, made her hasten to answer her question.

"I am sorry," she said, "that I can give you no prospect of an interview with Mrs. Redmain before three o'clock. She will very likely not be out of her room before one.—I suppose you saw her at Durnmelling?"

"Yes, ma'am," answered Mary, "—and at Testbridge."

It kept growing on the housekeeper that she had made a mistake—though to what extent she sought in vain to determine.

"You will find it rather wearisome waiting," she said next: "—would you not like to help me with my work?"

Already she had the sunflowers under her creative hands.

"I should be very glad—if I can do it well enough to please you, ma'am," answered Mary. "But," she added, "would you kindly see that Mrs. Redmain is told, as soon as she wakes, that I am here?"

"Oblige me by ringing the bell," said Mrs. Perkin.—"Send Mrs. Folter here."

A rather cross-looking, red-faced, thin woman appeared, whom she requested to let her mistress know, as soon as was proper, that there was a young person in the house who said she had come from Testbridge by appointment to see her.

"Yes, ma'am," said Folter, with a supercilious, yet familiar nod to Mary; "I'll take care she knows."

Mary passed what would have been a dreary morning to one dependent on her company. It was quite three o'clock when she was at length summoned to Mrs. Redmain's boudoir. Folter, who was her guide thither, lingered, in the soft closing of the door, long enough to learn that her mistress received the young person with a kiss—almost as much to Mary's surprise as Folter's annoyance, which annoyance partly to relieve, partly to pass on to Mrs. Perkin, whose reception of Mary she had learned, Folter hastened to report the fact, and succeeded thereby in occasioning no small uneasiness in the bosom of the housekeeper, who was almost as much afraid of her mistress as the other servants were of herself. Some time she spent in expectant trepidation, but gradually, as nothing came of it, calmed her fears, and concluded that her behaviour to Mary had been quite correct, seeing the girl had made it no ground of complaint.

But although Hesper, being at the moment in toler-

able spirits, in reaction from her depression of the day before, received Mary with a kiss, she did not ask her a question about her journey, or as to how she had spent the night. She was there, and looking all right, and that was enough. On the other hand, she did proceed to have her at once properly settled.

The little room appointed her looked upon a small court or yard, and was dark, but otherwise very comfortable. As soon as she was left to herself, she opened her boxes, put her things away in drawers and wardrobe, arranged her books within easy reach of the low chair Hesper had sent for from the drawing-room for her, and sat down to read a little, brood a little, and build a few castles in the air, more lovely than evanescent: no other house is so like its builder as this sort of castle.

About eight o'clock, Folter summoned her to go to Mrs. Redmain. By this time she was tired: she was accustomed to tea in the afternoon, and since her dinner with the housekeeper, she had had nothing.

She found Mrs. Redmain dressed for the evening. As soon as Mary entered, she dismissed Folter.

"I am going out to dinner," she said. "Are you quite comfortable?"

"I am rather cold, and should like some tea," said Mary.

"My poor girl! have you had no tea?" said Hesper, with some concern, and more annoyance. "You are looking quite pale, I see! When did you have anything to eat?"

"I had a good dinner at one o'clock," replied Mary, with a rather weary smile.

"This is dreadful!" said Hesper. "What can the servants be about!"

"And please, may I have a little fire?" begged Mary.

"Certainly," replied Hesper, knitting her brows with a look of slight anguish. "Is it possible you have been sitting all day without one? Why did you not ring the bell?" She took one of her hands:—"You are frozen!" she said.

"Oh, no!" answered Mary; "I am far from that. You see nobody knows yet what to do with me.—You hardly know yourself," she added, with a merry look. "But if you wouldn't mind telling Mrs. Perkin where you wish me to have my meals, that would put it all right, I think."

"Very well," said Hesper, in a tone that for her was sharp. "Will you ring the bell."

She sent for the housekeeper, who presently appeared —lank and tall, with her head on one side like a lamp-post in distress, but calm and prepared—a dumb fortress, with a live garrison.

"I wish you, Mrs. Perkin, to arrange with Miss Marston about her meals."

"Yes, ma'am," answered Mrs. Perkin, with sedatest utterance.

"Mrs. Perkin," said Mary, "I don't want to be trouble-some; tell me what will suit you best."

But Mrs. Perkin did not even look at her; standing straight as a rush, she kept her eyes on her mistress.

"Do you desire, ma'am, that Miss Marston should have her meals in the housekeeper's room?" she asked.

"That must be as Miss Marston pleases," answered Hesper. "If she prefer them in her own, you will see they are properly sent up."

"Very well, ma'am!—Then I wait Miss Marston's orders," said Mrs. Perkin, and turned to leave the room. But when her mistress spoke again, she turned again and stood. It was Mary, however, whom Hesper addressed.

"Mary," she said, apparently foreboding worse from the tone of the housekeeper's obedience than from her occurred neglect, "when I am alone, you shall take your meals with me; and when I have any one with me, Mrs. Perkin will see that they are sent to your room. We will settle it so."

"Thank you," said Mary.

"Very well, ma'am," said Mrs. Perkin.

"Send Miss Marston some tea directly," said Hesper.

Scarcely was Mrs. Perkin gone when the brougham was announced. Mary returned to her room, and in a little while, tea, with thin bread and butter in limited quantity, was brought her. But it was brought by Jemima, whose face wore a cheerful smile over the tray she carried: she at least did not grudge Mary her superior place in the household.

"Do you think, Jemima," asked Mary, "you could manage to answer my bell when I ring?"

"I should only be too glad, miss; it would be nothing but a pleasure to me; and I'd jump to it if I was in the way; but if I was upstairs, which this house ain't a place to hear bells in, sure I am nobody would let me know as you was a ringin'; and if you was to think as how I was giving of myself airs, like some people not far out of this square, I should be both sorry and ashamed —an' that's more'n I'd say for my place to Mrs. Perkin, miss."

"You needn't be afraid of that, Jemima," returned Mary. "If you don't answer when I ring, I shall know as well as if you told me, that you either don't hear, or can't come at the moment. I shan't be exacting."

"Don't you be afeared to ring, miss: I'll answer your bell as often as I hear it."

"Could you bring me a loaf? I have had nothing

since Mrs. Perkin's dinner; and this bread and butter is rather too delicately cut," said Mary.

"Laws, miss, you must be nigh clemmed!" said the girl; and hastening away, she soon returned with a loaf, and butter, and a pot of marmalade sent by the cook, who was only too glad to open a safety-valve to her pleasure at the discomfiture of Mrs. Perkin.

"When would you like your breakfast, miss?" asked Jemima, as she removed the tea-things.

"Any time convenient," replied Mary.

"It's much the same to me, miss, so it's not before there's bilin' water. You'll have it in bed, miss?"

"No, thank you. I never do."

"You'd better, miss."

"I could not think of it."

"It makes no more trouble—less, miss, than if I had to get it when the room-breakfast was on. I've got to get the things together anyhow; and why shouldn't you have it as well as Mrs. Perkin, or that ill-tempered cocka-too, Mrs. Folter? You're a lady, and that's more'n can be said for either of them—justly, that is."

"You don't mean," said Mary, surprised out of her discretion, "that the housekeeper and the lady's-maid have breakfast in bed?"

"It's every blessed mornin' as I've got to take it up to 'em, miss, upon my word of honour with a soft-biled egg, or a box o' sardines, new-opened, or a slice o' break-fast bacon, streaky. An' I do *not* think as it belongs proper to my place; only you see, miss, the kitchen-maid has got to do it for the cook, an' if I don't, who is there? It's not them would let the scullery-maid come near them in their beds."

"Does Mrs. Perkin know that the cook and the lady's-maid have it as well as herself?"

"Not she, miss; she'd soon make their coffee too 'ot! She's the only lady down stairs—she is! No more don't Mrs. Folter know as the cook has her's only if she did, it wouldn't make no differ, for she daren't tell. And cook, to be sure, it ain't her breakfast, only a cup o' tea an' a bit o' toast, to get her heart up first."

"Well," said Mary, "I certainly shall not add another to the breakfasts in bed. But I must trouble you all the same to bring it me here. I will make my bed, and do out the room myself, if you will come and finish it off for me."

"Oh, no, indeed, miss, you mustn't do that! Think what they'd say of you down stairs! They'd despise you downright!"

"I shall do it, Jemima. If they were servants of the right sort, I should like to have their good opinion, and they would think all the more of me for doing my share; as it is, I should count it a disgrace to care a straw what they thought. We must do our work, and not mind what people say."

"Yes, miss, that's what my mother used to say to my father, when he wouldn't be reasonable. But I must go, miss, or I shall catch it for gossiping with you—that's what *she*'ll call it."

When Jemima was gone, Mary fell a thinking afresh. It was all very well, she said to herself, to talk about doing her work, but here she was with scarce a shadow of an idea what her work was! Had *any* work been given her to do in this house? Had she presumed in coming—anticipated the guidance of providence, and was she therefore now where she had no right to be? She could not tell; but any how, here she was, and no one could be anywhere without the fact involving its own duty. Even if she had put herself there, and was to

blame for being there, that did not free her from the obligations of the position, and she was willing to do whatever should *now* be given her to do. God was not a hard master; if she had made a mistake, he would pardon her, and either give her work here where she found herself, or send her elsewhere. I need not say that thinking was not all her care; for she thought in the presence of him who, because he is always setting our wrong things right, is called God our Saviour.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### MR. AND MRS. HELMER.

THE next morning, Mary set out to find Letty, from whom, as I have said, she had heard but twice since her marriage. Mary had written again about a month ago, but had had no reply. The sad fact was, that, ever since she left Testbridge, Letty, for a long time, without knowing it, had been going down hill. There have been many whose earnestness has vanished with the presence of those whose influence awoke it. Letty's better self seemed to have remained behind with Mary; and not even if he had been as good as she thought him, could Tom himself have made up to her for the loss of such a friend.

But Letty had not found marriage at all the grand thing she had expected. With the faithfulness of a woman, however, she attributed her disappointment to something inherent in marriage, nowise affecting the man whom marriage had made her husband.

That he might be near the centre to which what little work he did, gravitated, Tom had taken a lodging

in a noisy street, as unlike all that Letty had been accustomed to, as anything London, except in its viler parts, could afford. Never a green thing was to be looked upon in any direction. Not a sweet sound was to be heard. The sun, at this time of the year, was seldom to be seen in London anywhere; and in Lydgate Street, even when there was no fog, it was but askance, and for a brief portion of the day, that he shone upon that side where stood their dusty windows. And then the noise!—a ceaseless torrent of sounds, of stony sounds, of iron sounds, of grinding sounds, of clashing sounds, of yells and cries—of all deafening and unpoetic discords! Letty had not much poetry in her, and needed what could be had from the outside so much the more. It is the people of a land without springs that must have cisterns. It is the poetic people without poetry that pant and pine for the country. When such get hold of a poet, they expect him to talk poetry, or at least to talk about poetry! I fancy poets do not read much poetry, and except to their peers do not often care to talk about it. But to one like Letty, however little she may understand, or even be aware of the need, the poetic is as necessary as rain in summer; while to one so little skilled in the finding of it, there was none visible, audible, or perceptible about her—except indeed what, of poorest sort for her uses, she might discover bottled in some circulating library: there was one—blessed proximity!—within ten minutes' walk of her.

Once a week or so, some weeks oftener, Tom would take her to the play, and that was indeed a happiness —not because of the pleasure of the play only or chiefly, though that was great, but in the main because she had Tom beside her all the time, and mixed up Tom with the play, and the play with Tom.

Alas! Tom was not half so dependent upon her,

neither derived half so much pleasure from her company. Some of his evenings every week he spent at houses where those who received him had not the faintest idea whether he had a wife or not, and cared as little, for it would have made no difference: they would not have invited her. Small, silly, conceited Tom, regarding himself as a somebody, was more than content to be asked to such people's houses. He thought he went as a lion, whereas it was merely as a jackal: so great is the love of some for wild beasts in general, that they even think something of jackals. He was aware of no insult to himself in asking him whether as a lion or any other wild beast, nor of any to his wife and himself together in not asking her with him. While she sat in her dreary lodging, dingily clad and lonely, Tom, dressed in the height of the fashion, would be strolling about grand rooms, now exchanging a flying shot of recognition, now pausing to pay a compliment to this lady on her singing, to that on her verses, to a third, where he dared, on her dress; for good-natured Tom was profuse of compliments, not without a degree and kind of honesty in them; now singing one of his own songs to the accompaniment of some gracious goddess, now accompanying the same or some other gracious goddess as she sang—for Tom could do that well enough for people without a conscience in their music; now in the corner of a conservatory, now in a cosy little third room behind a back drawing-room, talking nonsense with some lady foolish enough to be amused with his folly. Tom meant no harm and did not do much—was only a human butterfly, amusing himself with other creatures of a day, who have no notion that death cannot kill them, or they might perhaps be more miserable than they are. They think, if they think at all, that it is life, strong in them, that makes them forget death;

whereas, in truth, it is death, strong in them, that makes them forget life. Like a humming-bird, all sparkle and flash, Tom flitted through the tropical delights of such society as his "uncommon good luck" had gained him admission to, forming many an evanescent friendship, and taking many a graceful liberty for which his pleasant looks, confident manners, and free carriage were his indemnity—for Tom seemed to have been born to show what a nice sort of a person a fool, well put together, may be—with his high-bred air, and his ready replies, for he had also a little of that social element, once highly valued, now less countenanced, and rare—I mean wit.

He had indeed plenty of all sorts of brains; but no amount of talent could reveal to him the reason or the meaning of the fact, that wedded life was less interesting than courtship; for the former, the reason, lay in himself and of himself proper he knew, as I have said, next to nothing; while the latter, the meaning of the fact, is profound as eternity. He had no notion that, when he married, his life was thereby, in a lofty and blessed sense, forfeit; that to save his wife's life he must yield his own, she doing the same for him—for God himself can save no other way. But the notion of any saving, or the need of it, was far from Tom; nor had Letty, for her part, any thought of it either, except from the tyranny of her aunt. Not the less in truth did they both want saving—very much saving, before life could be to either of them a good thing. It is only its inborn possibility of, and divine tendency towards blossoming, that constitutes life a good thing. Life's blossom is its salvation, its redemption, the justification of its existence—and is a thing far off with most of us. For Tom, his highest notion of life was to be recognized by the world for that which he had chosen as his idea of himself—to have the

reviews allow him a poet, not grudgingly, nor with abatement of any sort, but recognizing him as the genius he must contrive to believe himself, or "perish in" his "self-contempt." Then would he live and die in the blessed assurance that his name would be for ever on the lips and in the hearts of that idol of fools they call *posterity* —divinity as vague as the old gray Fate, and less noble, inasmuch as it is but the supposed concave whence is to rebound the man's own opinion of himself.

While jewelly Tom was idling away time which yet could hardly be called precious, his little brown wife, as I have said, sat at home—such home as a lodging can be for a wife whose husband finds his interest mainly outside of it—inquired after by nobody, thought of by nobody, hardly even taken up by her own poor weary self; now trying in vain after interest in the feeble trash she was reading; now getting into the story for the last half of a chapter, to find herself, when the scene changed at the next, as far out and away and lost as ever; now dropping the book on her knee, to sit musing—if indeed such poor mental vagaries as hers can be called even musing!—ignorant what was the matter with her, hardly knowing that anything was the matter, and yet pining morally, spiritually, and psychically; now wondering when Tom would be home; now trying to congratulate herself on his being such a favourite, and thinking what an honour it was to a poor country girl like her to be the wife of a man so much courted by the best society—for she never doubted that the people to whose houses Tom went, desired his company from admiration of his writings. She had not an idea that never a soul of them or of their guests cared a straw about what he wrote—except indeed, here and there, a young lady in her first season, who thought it a grand thing to know an author, as poor

Letty thought it a grand thing to be the wife of one. Hail to the coming time when, those who write books outnumbering those who do not, a man will be thought no more of because he can write, than because he can sit a horse or brew beer! In that happy time the true writer will be neither an atom the more regarded nor disregarded; he will only be less troubled with birthday books, requests for autographs, and such-like irritating attentions. From that time also, it may be, the number of writers will begin to diminish; for then, it is to be hoped, men will begin to see that it is better to do the inferior thing well, than the superior thing after a middling fashion. The man who would not rather be a good shoemaker than a middling author, would be no honour to the shoemakers, and can hardly be any to the authors. I have the comfort that in this all authors will agree with me, for which of us is now able to see himself *middling?* Honourable above all honour that authorship can give, is he who can.

It was through some of his old college friends that Tom had thus easily stepped into the literary profession. They were young men with money and friends to back them, who, having taken to literature as soon as they chipped the university-shell, were already in the full swing of periodical production, when Tom, to quote two rather contradictory utterances of his mother, ruined his own prospects, and made Letty's fortune, by marrying her. I cannot say, however, that they had found him remunerative employment. The best they had done for him was to bring him into such a half sort of connection with a certain weekly paper, that now and then he got something printed in it, and now and then, with the joke of acknowledging an obligation irremunerable, the editor would hand him what he called a honorarium, but

what in reality was a five-pound note. When such an event occurred, Tom would feel his bosom swell with the imagined dignity of supporting a family by literary labour, and, forgetful of the sparseness of his mother's doles, who delighted to make the young couple feel the bitterness of dependence, would immediately, on the strength of it, invite his friends to supper—not at the lodging where Letty sat lonely, but at some tavern frequented by people of the craft. It was at such times, and in the company of men certainly not better than himself, that Tom's hopes were brightest, and his confidence greatest: therefore such seasons were those of his highest bliss. Especially when his sensitive but poor imagination was stimulated from the nerveside of the brain, was Tom in his glory; and it was not the "few glasses of champagne," of which he talked so airily, that had all the honour of crowning him king of fate and poet of the world. Long after midnight, upon such and many other occasions, would he and his companions sit laughing and jesting and drinking, some saying witty things, and all of them foolish things and worse; inventing stories apropos of the foibles of friends, and relating anecdotes which grew more and more irreverent to God and women as the night advanced, and the wine gained power, and the shame-faced angels of their true selves, made in the image of God, withdrew into the dark; until at last, between night and morning, Tom would reel gracefully home, using all the power of his will—the best use to which it ever was put—to subdue the drunkenness of which, even in its embrace, he had the lingering honour to be ashamed, that he might face his wife with the appearance of the gentleman he was anxious she should continue to consider him.

It was an unhappy thing for Tom that his mother,

having persuaded her dying husband "for Tom's sake" to leave the money in her power, should not now have carried her tyranny farther, and refused him money altogether. He would then have been compelled to work harder, and to use what he made in procuring the necessaries of life. There might have been some hope for him then. As it was, his profession was a mere grasping after the honour of a workman without the doing of the work; while the little he gained by it was, at the same time, more than enough to foster the self-deception that he did something in the world. With the money he gave her, which was never more than a part of what his mother sent him, Letty had much ado to make both ends meet; and, while he ran in debt to his tailor and bootmaker, she never had anything new to wear. She did sometimes wish he would take her out with him a little oftener of an evening; for sometimes she felt so lonely as to be quite unable to amuse herself: her resources were not many in her position, and fewer still in herself; but she always reflected that he could not afford it, and it was long ere she began to have any doubt or uneasiness about him—long before she began even to imagine it might be well if he spent his evenings with her, or at least in other ways and other company than he did. When first such a thought presented itself, she banished it as a disgrace to herself, and an insult to him. But it was no wonder if she found marriage dull, poor child!—after such expectations too from her Tom!

What a pity it seems to our purblind eyes, that so many girls should be married before they are women! The woman comes at length, and finds she is forestalled—that the prostrate and mutilated Dagon of a girl's divinity is all that is left her to do the best with

she can! But, thank God, in the faithfully accepted and encountered responsibility, the woman must at length become aware that she has under her feet an ascending stair by which to climb to the woman of the divine ideal.

There was at present, however, nothing to be called thought in the mind of Letty. She had even lost much of what faculty of thinking had been developed in her by the care of cousin Godfrey. That had speedily followed the decay of the aspiration kindled in her by Mary. Her whole life now, as much of it, that is, as was awake, was Tom, and only Tom. Her whole day was but the continuous and little varied hope of his presence. Most of the time she had a book in her hands, but ever again book and hands would sink into her lap, and she would sit staring before her at nothing. She was not unhappy, she was only not happy. At first it was a speechless delight to have as many novels as she pleased, and she thought Tom the very prince of bounty in not merely permitting her to read them, but bringing them to her, one after the other, sometimes two at once, in spendthrift profusion. The first thing that made her aware she was not quite happy was the discovery that novels were losing their charm, that they were not sufficient to make her day pass, that they were only dessert and she had no dinner. When it came to difficulty in going on with a new one long enough to get interested in it, she sighed heavily, and began to think that perhaps life was rather a dreary thing—at least considerably diluted with the unsatisfactory. How many of my readers feel the same! How few of them will recognize that the state of things would indeed be desperate were it otherwise! How many would go on and on being only butterflies, but for life's dismay! And who would

choose to be a butterfly, even if life and summer and the flowers were to last for ever!

"I would," I fancy this and that reader saying.

"Then," I answer, "the only argument you are equal to, is the fact that life nor summer nor the flowers do last for ever."

"I suppose I am made a butterfly," do you say? "seeing I prefer to be one."

"Ah! do you say so indeed? Then you begin to excuse yourself, and what does that mean? It means that you are no butterfly, for a butterfly—no, nor an angel in heaven—could never begin excusing the law of its existence.—Butterfly-brother, the hail will be upon you."

I may not then pity Letty that she had to discover that novels taken alone serve one much as sweetmeats *ad libitum* do children, nor that she had to prove that life has in it that spiritual quinine, precious because bitter, whose part it is to wake the higher hunger.

Tom talked of himself as on the staff of the Firefly—such was the name of the newspaper whose editor sometimes paid him—a weekly of great pretence, which took upon itself the mystery of things, as if it were God's spy. It was popular in a way, chiefly in fashionable circles. As regarded the opinions it promulgated, I never heard one who understood the particular question at any time handled, say it was correct. Its writers were mostly young men, and their passion was to say clever things. If a friend's book came in their way, it was treated worse or better than that of a stranger, but with impartial disregard for truth in either case; yet many were the authors who would go up endless back stairs to secure from that paper a flattering criticism, and then be as proud of it as if it had been the genuine and unsought utterance of a true man's conviction; and many were the men, im-

measurably the superiors of the reviewers, and in a general way acquainted with their character, who would accept as conclusive upon the merits of a book the opinions they gave, nor ever question a mode of quotation by which a book was made to show itself whatever the reviewer chose to call it. A scandalous rumour of any kind, especially from the region styled "high life," often false, and always incorrect, was the delight both of the paper and of its readers; and the interest it thus awoke, united to the fear it thus caused, was mainly what procured for such as were known to be employed upon it, the entrée of houses where, if they had had a private existence only, their faces would never have been seen. But, to do Tom justice, he wrote nothing of this sort: he was neither ill-natured nor experienced enough for that department; what he did write was clever, shallow sketches of that same society into whose charmed precincts he was but so lately a comer that much was to him interesting which had long ceased to be observed by eyes turned horny with the glare of the world's footlights; and while these sketches pleased the young people especially, even their jaded elders enjoyed the sparkling reflex of what they called life, as seen by an outsider; for they were thereby enabled to feel for a moment a slight interest in themselves objectively, along with a galvanized sense of existence as the producers of history. These sketches did more for the paper than the editor was willing to know or acknowledge.

But the Firefly produced also a little art on its own account—not always very original, but at least not a sucking of life from the labour of others, as is most of that parasitic thing miscalled criticism. In this branch Tom had a share, in the shape of verse. A ready faculty was his, but one seldom roused by immediate interest,

and never by insight. It was not things themselves, but the reflection of things in the art of others, that moved him to produce. Coleridge, I think, says of Dryden, that he took fire with the running of his own wheels: so did Tom; but it was the running of the wheels of others that set his wheels running. He was like some young preachers who spend a part of the Saturday in reading this or that author, in order to *get up* the mental condition favourable to preaching on the Sunday. He was really fond of poetry; delighted in the study of its external elements for the sake of his craft; possessed not only a good but a cultivated ear for verse, which is a rare thing out of the craft; had true pleasure in a fine phrase, in a strong or brilliant word; last and chief, had a special faculty for imitation; from which gifts, graces, and acquirements, it came, that he could write almost in any style that moved him—so far, at least, as to remind one who knew it, of that style; and that every now and then appeared verses of his in the Firefly.

As often as this took place, Letty was in the third heaven of delight. For was not Tom's poetry unquestionably superior to anything else the age could produce? was the poetry cousin Godfrey made her read, once to be compared with Tom's? and was not Tom her own husband? Happy woman she!

But by the time at which my narrative has arrived, the first mist of a coming fog had begun to gather faintly dim in her heart. When Tom would come home happy, but talk perplexingly; when he would drop asleep in the middle of a story she could make nothing of; when he would burst out, and go on laughing, and refuse to explain the motive; how was she to avoid the conclusion forced upon her, that he had taken too much strong drink? and when she noted that this condition reappeared

at shorter and shorter intervals, might she not well begin to be frightened, and to feel what she dared not allow, that she was being gradually left alone—that Tom had struck into a diverging path, and they were slowly parting miles from each other?

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